



The Heart of David



The Psalmist-King

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"And all the upright in heart shall glory." Ps lxiv.10.

The Heart of David the Psalmist-King

being certain Bible chronicles
set in order to compass the
life and to show the love and
zeal of the crowned shepherd
of Israel, and written with
dutiful imagination in the
fuller manner of discourse by

AUGUSTUS GEORGE HEATON

Illustrated by the Author

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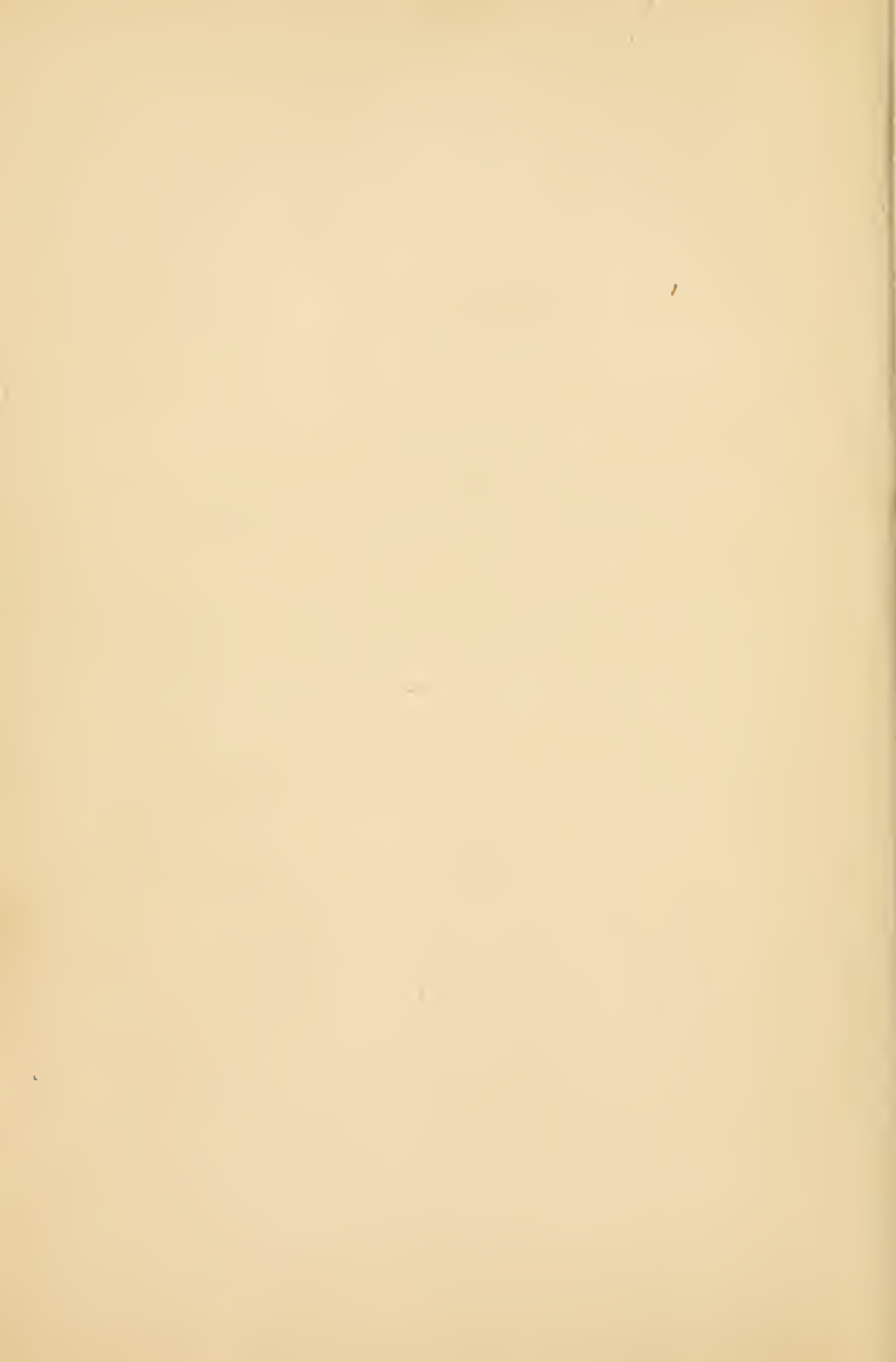
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AUGUSTUS GEORGE HEATON.

TO THE MEMORY OF
ELIZABETH GOODYEAR HEATON.

BORN 1790. DIED 1881.

WHO DEVOTED BUSY HANDS, GENIAL CONVERSATION, A WARM HEART AND A MEEK AND FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN SPIRIT TO THE GOOD OF ALL ABOUT HER DURING A LONG LIFE, THIS WORK IS DEDICATED BY HER BELOVED AND EVER GRATEFUL GRANDSON, THE AUTHOR.



PREFACE.

My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the King.—PSALM xlv: 1.

As will be inferred from the title, this book is based upon sentiments that glorify the life of the great poet of sacred song. It may happily give new appreciation of his character, not only to pious readers but to all interested in strength, bravery, chivalry, romance, talent, zeal and a love of the beautiful and ideal, turning even unstudied criticism to a higher comprehension of his nature.

The ascent of David from the station of a poor shepherd boy, the youngest son of a large family in a small Judean village, to the throne of Israel was due to the possession of an extraordinary combination of high qualities.

Physically he was “ruddy and withal of a beautiful countenance and goodly to look to,” of great strength, endurance and activity, very dexterous in the use of weapons and musical instruments and of rare and persuasive voice in speech and song. Mentally he developed high ability as a leader in war, a civil ruler, a law maker, a naturalist, a poet, a philosopher and a theologian, and he was renowned for courage, firmness, energy, hope, faith, long suffering and other qualities that command success and authority.

But physical powers may be perilous if undirected by mind. The union of the two are dangerous to mankind if unguided by right purposes, and, as all biography proves, these have their highest inspiration from belief, obedience and love regarding a supreme force controlling the universe, however it be named or conceived by humanity. Strength and address of body are but the roots, mental qualities are but the branches and foliage, of a manhood which can only be complete in the blossoms of true sentiment and the fruits of a righteous and lofty spirit. It was this completion of David's nature that perfected his greatness in all things. His activity of body and energy of mind culminated in zeal of soul. His magnanimity in triumph, his lack of arrogance and false pride, his hatred of baseness in friend or foe, his sympathy for the worthy in distress, his generosity, his unfailing gratitude to his helpers in need, and his respect for all in authority are but the lesser evidences of his higher character. He had not merely a lofty appreciation of beauty, fitness, righteousness and spirituality, but an earnest love for them in all things.

Thus David's HEART controlled his thoughts and actions, and it is the general loveliness, sincerity, uprightness and purity of its impulses that most distinguishes his career. That which weak or ill-developed men cannot or will not confess, which reserved men hold to in silence or which excitable ones declaim without consistency, was not merely his attribute as a lover or poet, but was his living glory and as normal a part of his being as his vigor of frame and energy of mind. And it is the warmth, impetuosity and exaltation of feeling he evinced that most endears him, as it does all true genius, to the hearts of men. His heart and its emotions are,

indeed, constantly referred to in the Psalms and glorify their language throughout, so that we hardly need his open declarations: "I commune with mine own heart"; "With my whole heart have I sought Thee"; "I will praise the Lord with my whole heart"; "My heart trusteth in him"; "I will love Thee, O Lord, my strength!" and many other passages, to prove their inspiration. How beneficent is the Creator in making this grace of heart, this highest attribute of manhood, free to all humanity. Comparatively few among the toiling millions of earth have opportunity to eat bountifully of the tree of knowledge, whose fruit, while at times poisonous in its immaturity, is so rich in nutriment when fully ripe, but the poorest and most ignorant slave can share with kings the wisdom of Nature's infallible teachings, the charms it presents to every sense, the tenderness of love and a zealous devotion to deity.

With the human sentiment of the Psalmist's heart, in an age when by immemorial and world-wide custom the number of wives and concubines was limited only by the extent of man's wealth and power, the Bible narrative especially associates four women—Michal, the daughter of Saul; Abigail, the wife of Nabal; Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, and Abishag, the Shunammite maiden.

David's love for these has been taken by the author as a theme to illumine four periods of his life—his youthful valor and prosperity, his years of persecution and distress, his height of fame and power, and his meek old age, showing both the warmth of his heart for the sex best embodying all that is beautiful, spiritual and refined and the charm his rare attributes exercised. This ardor of nature, which has ever been both the power and peril of genius, and which is so often shown in impetuous and

covetous passion, diffused susceptibility, sleepless jealousy, and intolerance of any opposition, was, in one defiance of control, the cause of the Psalmist's greatest woe. Tempted as never before by Bathsheba's complete loveliness, he in a moment of royal arrogance fell from his higher nature and then desperately committed as dark a crime to save her honor and life. But this exceptional sin of David's human heart gives occasion, in his abhorrence of his deeds, his penitent self-humiliation, his sublime confession and his patient and faithful endurance of long and bitter chastisement, for but fuller manifestation of its more divine qualities and unites him the closer to erring and contrite humanity. He has also been sternly judged for slaughter in war and for asking in his final days the death of two men he abhorred. But in war he, when not directly commanded to exterminate the foe, followed often only the general custom of his age for the greater security of his begirt nation in its new possessions. As to Joab and Shimei, their base, murderous and treasonable deeds had made them a danger to his son's reign as to his own and their execution a measure of security.

In the Psalmist's words "the heart is deep" and in its depths covetousness, instability, jealousy, intolerance and other evil emotions contend at times terribly for mastery, but David's heart had a range above these and beyond the tender claims of amatory ardor or poetic susceptibility. In his perfect love for Jonathan—that love "passing the love of women," in his constant zeal for his beset nation, and, above all, in his ever enthusiastic adoration, through woe or prosperity and amid the idolatry of his age, of the righteous, gracious and almighty one God of heaven and earth, we see the virtue,

humility and largeness of soul that made him chosen of the Lord for deeds of undying fame.

It is this supreme part of David's being, this heart both human and divine dominating all his bodily and mental attributes, that the writer, in hours of leisure from his easel during many past years, has found a fascination in endeavoring to express, and the result has been so kindly commended by certain prominent clergymen and authors that he now ventures its requested publication. Realizing fully the height and difficulty of his undertaking, he asks from learned readers all helpful comment that may make it, in any revision, better worthy of their interest and of general perusal and meditation. The work while in dramatic form and in four parts, is extended in many passages and so connected as a whole that, in the private reading for which it is intended, not only the sentiments but the principal associations, surrounding circumstances and leading events of David's entire life are offered to fuller view.

Though many psalms could be cited, in addition to those clearly and appositely quoted in the text, and frequent notes be appended in evidence of the study involved, these will be needless to many readers and, if any oversights in research are discovered, the spirit of the work at least and all developments of thought and action will be found in conscientious conformity to Bible teaching by every one holding the Old Testament sacred.

In this it may best appeal not only to many denominations, but to differing religions that share the heritage of David's greatness of soul and song.

A. G. H.

WASHINGTON, D. C., September 1, 1900.

THE HEART OF DAVID, THE PSALMIST KING.

DAVID AND MICHAL.

DAVID AND ABIGAIL.

DAVID AND BATHSHEBA.

DAVID AND ABISHAG.

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BOOK I.

DAVID AND MICHAL.

A WRITING IN FIVE PARTS.

FROM 1ST SAMUEL; XVI-XVIII CHS.

DAVID AND MICHAL.

THE PERSONS WHO ARE SET FORTH IN THIS WRITING.

DAVID, *Shepherd and Captain in the host.*

SAUL, *King of Israel and Judah.*

JONATHAN, *Eldest son of Saul.*

ISHBOSHETH, *Youngest son of Saul.*

ABNER, *Captain of the host.*

ADRIEL, *Officer of Saul.*

PHALTIEL, *Officer of Saul.*

JESSE, *Father of David.*

ELIAB,

ABINADAB,

SHAMMAH,

NATHANEEL,

RADDAI,

OZEM,

ABISHAI,

JOAB,

ASAHIEL,

} *Brethren of David.*

} *Sons of Zeruah.*

GOLIATH, *Champion of the Philistines.*

*Servants of Saul, Captains and Soldiers, Scribes, Merchants,
Youths, Elders, and People of Gibeah.*

MICHAL, *Younger daughter of Saul.*

MERAB, *Elder daughter of Saul.*

AHINOAM, *Queen of Israel and Judah.*

RIZPAH, *Concubine of Saul.*

JESSICA, *Wife of Jesse.*

ZERUIAH, *Daughter of Jesse.*

ABIGAIL, *Second daughter of Jesse.*

Maid Servants, Singers, and Women of Gibeah.

*The Places where these Persons hold discourse are the House
of Jesse at Bethlehem, the King's Palace and the Street of
Gibeah, the Camp of Saul at Elah's Vale and the Camp of
David.*

DAVID AND MICHAL.

THE PARTS AND PLACES SET IN ORDER.

PART I.

PLACE I. *An Apartment in the Palace at Gibeah.* Merab and Michal. Then Saul, then David, who gaineth Saul's favor by playing on his harp.

PLACE II. *The House of Jesse at Bethlehem.* Jesse and Jessica, surrounded by their sons Nathaneel, Raddai and Ozem and their daughters Zeruiah and Abigail and Zeruiah's sons Abishai, Joab and Asahel. Jesse discourseth of Bethlehem and the war. David entereth.

PART II.

PLACE I. *The Camp in the Vale of Elah.* Eliab, Abinadab, Shammah and Soldiers. David entering, heareth Goliath's defiance, and is permitted by Saul to fight with him. He overcometh Goliath and maketh a covenant with Jonathan.

PART III.

PLACE I. *A Street of Gibeah before the Palace.* A Multitude of People rejoicing. The host and Saul, Jonathan and David return in triumph. Women sing the praise of David.

PLACE II. *The Court of the Palace.* Enter David, then Michal who sheweth her favor. Enter Saul with many others. Saul maketh woeful prophecies and terrifieth all. David's life is sought by him.

PART IV.

PLACE I. *A Garden of the Palace.* Merab and Adriel. Then Saul, who sendeth for David and desireth to espouse Merab to him. David and Merab. Then Michal. Abner and Rizpah enter.

PLACE II. *Chief Room of the Palace.* Merab is espoused by Saul to Adriel and David, at length, to Michal.

PART V.

PLACE I. *David's camp.* His converse with Jonathan. He accepteth a dowry which Saul proposeth.

PLACE II. *David is wedded to Michal.*



DAVID AND MICHAL.

DAVID AND MICHAL.

PART I.

PLACE I. An apartment in the Palace at Gibeah. Merab with embroidery. Michal meditateth.

Merab. Thy heart is merry, Michal, let me share
The secret of that inner joyfulness
Wherein thy lips do overflow their bound.

Michal. Why wouldst thou, my sister?

Merab. Surely joy
Is as a summer perfume from the fields
Which he who willeth should of right partake.

Michal. Nay, Merab, joyfulness pertaineth not
To base and lowly men or I should count
Its full possession but a little thing.
It is the sweet frankincense of the proud,
The mighty and the beautiful of earth,
The rich and the exalted. At the veil
And altar of their heart it sanctifies
Life's offerings, and those who stand without
But know its precious savor as they serve
Its chosen people with humility.

Merab. O Michal, thrust this evil spirit out,
A maiden who is turnéd from the pure
Sincere and meek behavior of her youth
By riches, wedlock's guiles or pomp of power

To arrogance of pride and blind conceit,
Dissimulation, craft and all untruth,
Who loveth but the flatterer, granting none
Of higher duty aught of reverence,
Is evermore a horror to the heart.
Ah, my fair sister, thou hast, verily,
A haughty spirit.

Michal. I rejoice thereat.

Merab. So be it, yet if thou consentest not
That joy, though in unequal lot bestowed,
Doth yet belong to all the sons of men,
I, peradventure, should no longer plead
To know thy mirthfulness, but rather now
Say haughtily, the daughter of King Saul,
Thine elder sister, doth require thee
To open all the secrets of thy thought
Unto her pleasure.

Michal. This authority
I bow unto with worthy reverence.
What shall thy servant do, withal, to gain
The riches of thy favor? Verily,
Good Merab, I do cherish thee the more
That thou art elder daughter of a king,
Than thou dost love thyself.

Merab. Then let thy mirth
Be ended and no longer hide from me
The joy that giveth thee so glad a face.

Michal. Thou knowest it already.

Merab. Now dost thou
Make sport of me.

Michal. Nay, Merab, as I live,
For all the pleasure of my countenance

Came unaware, as I did meditate
That I was kindred unto such as thee.

Merab. Now, truly, thou dost mock me, thou shalt see
The day thou wilt bewail so sharp a tongue.

Michal. Have patience with me. Surely, I rejoice
That I am also daughter of a king
And glory in my pride.

Merab. Thou mockest me,
My little sister. Such a love as thine,
Or as thou feignest, is no living spring.
It is a quiet pool in time of rain
Which by the heat of noontide vanisheth.
I am persuaded deeper streams shall flow
When thou hast woman's heart.

Michal. Thou knowest well
That I do love thee, Merab. Yet, in truth,
Pride only to my pleasure ministered
When thou didst mark the playing of my lips.
And is it not a joy to meditate
Upon the goodly things about my way?
What maiden of the Hebrews saving thou,
My well of wisdom, hath a higher place?
I stand upon the marble terraces
Of an exalted life and, if there be
A god of youth, he boweth down to me,
Saying "I love thee," and he casteth pain
And every ill of body from my lot
And saith to peril "Come not nigh to her
That this her royal pathway may proclaim
I am alone the king of all delight."
Unto my vision every goodly thing
Is brought which groweth or is fashioned
By cunning artificers. These mine ears

Attend such melody by night and day
From lute and harp, from psaltery and voice,
From bird and leaping fountain, that the wound
Of silence would be death. The air I breathe
Is ladened, when the flowers ask respite
From living gift, with their sweet memories
Made captive in the east, and spice and gum
Whisper of some desire far away;
And every dainty meat awaiteth me
Before I know of hunger, and my lips
Drink mirthful cups of Eshcol's ruddy wine.

Merab. Thou art vainglorious, my little one,
Have I not greater measure of thy joy?

Michal. Ah, Merab, though my years are less than thine,
Yet am I truly richer than thou art,
Seeing that more remaineth unto me
Of joyful days to gather fruit so fair.
Nor do the sea and earth and air alone
Provide my youth with choicest offerings,
But to the senses of my spirit come
The richer gifts of men who reverence
The daughter of their king. What silken veil
Of Babylon doth wind about my throat
With touch as soft and pleasant as the lips
Of serving women when they kiss my feet
In tribute of their poor humility?
The ears of my conceit no less receive
From every voice of high or low degree
Extolling words which, like a multitude
Of honey-burdened bees, live in my heart,
The sight of pride doth in its sky behold
A host of gracious or beseeching eyes,
Cheeks redden in the gladness of my smile

Or pale if I have frowned, and hands grow strong
To overcome, if I behold the strife.

Merab. Yet, dost thou lack, O Michal, one delight
Exceeding all thy pride imagineth
And past thine understanding utterly.

Michal. I pray thee, Merab, of thy wisdom give
This knowledge to me. What hath more delight
Than all these sweet possessions of my youth?

Merab. The joy of love bestowed when it hath found
The equal gift of one upon its throne.
Thou knowest only, in thy merry scorn,
The vain abasement of thy worshippers,
But not until in greater blessedness
Thy maiden bosom trembles, canst thou taste
Exceeding bliss, though daughter of a king.

Michal. And is such joy begotten of thy love
For Adriel, son of Barzillai?
Nay, surely, for thy visage mocketh thee
In sober meditation which, in vain,
Thou mayest offer those whose hearts are free
To gather rubies in the shining stream,
While thou dost search a cave in thy desire.

Merab. The richest gems lie deepest, such as roll
In wanton lightness where the brook descends
And give their little virtue to the sight
Of any wayfarer, I want them not.
While in the depth and richness of the love
Which Adriel doth offer and partake,
There is a gladness past thy heart's compare.
And if, perchance, my father's countenance
Rebuketh joy which dwelleth on the lips
And waiteth at the eyes, it needs must be
Because the king our father is perverse,

Turning away his face from what I would,
When it becomes the lamp of my desire.
Yet, furthermore, I sorrow in the thought
That what he doeth, either here or there,
Proceedeth not from wisdom's government
But often cometh from the evil will
Of some strange spirit which possesseth him.

Michal. Alas, I share the burden of thy fears
Concerning him who, in his better mind,
Doth love us both so fondly, but in this
He doeth wisely, Merab, thou shouldst wed
Some king who dreadeth Israel, whose will
To seek her favor and whose love for thee
Should make thy person precious in his sight
As Sarah was to just Abimelech.

Merab. Then, peradventure, thou wouldst cherish me,
Being a queen, with greater reverence,
Yea, with a fuller joy that I no more
Stood over thee in Israel's regard.

Michal. Thou hast too little pride for envy's care
Since thou hast stooped to favor Adriel,
Yet, were his father that Meholathite—
That other Barzillai who is famed
In Gilead, already, for his might
And great possessions and a liberal soul,
I should the less oppose thee in thy choice
And greet thy spouse, though lacking of a crown.

Merab. Thou wouldst be gracious, Michal, yet, in truth,
My Adriel is of an ancient house
And walketh wisely in the eyes of men,
And, though our father faileth not to see
The gladness of my face with him I love
And vexeth him thereat, as he is vexed

And troubled in his mind, as thou dost know,
At any little thing these latter years,
Yet doth he suffer my belovéd still
To come and go unhindered.

Michal. Thou, perchance,
Mayst weary of his presence, e'en as I
In heaviness of spirit do endure
That foolish Phalti, though he ceaseth not,
In feebleness of mind, to boast aloud
Throughout the palace and amid the great
Who dwell within the walls of Gibeah,
The many generations of his house,
Whereof an ancient man, as he hath said,
Did counsel Jochebed to secretly
Conceal the infant Moses on the Nile.
And after such a manner doth he tell
The great repute his father Laish hath
In Gallim, which none other can gainsay
For ignorance of where the place is hid.
A fig for such a spouse who, in despite
Of station so presumptuously won,
Hath naught of higher honor in his deeds.
Nay, I will not espouse a lesser man
Than one who holds a sceptre, or a sword
Mighty to scatter sceptres, for my pride
Hath not alone its title in my heart
But in the name of daughter unto Saul
Who, since the tribes of Israel were led
From Egypt forth by wonders manifold,
Hath been the first anointed as their king.

Merab. Behold he cometh. May it please the Lord
Above all royal glory to provide
The reigning of a father's tenderness.

Alas! I see his countenance and know
That my petition is already vain.

*[Saul entereth with a troubled face and carryeth a javelin.
Attendants follow after him.]*

Saul. Is there no place ye shall not follow me
Or am I but a wounded beast pursued
By vultures till I fall? Go ye your way
And give me peaceful respite in my house.

[Attendants go forth.]

Ah! silly daughters, wherefore are ye here?
What idleness is this which wasteth days?
Ye peradventure think, as by the chance
Of birth ye are begotten by a king,
That slothfulness hath won a royal grace.
What do ye? Wist ye aught that ye have said
In multiplying words and foolish tales?
Or shall I now mistrust that in your thought
Ye hold me not in honor and in fear?

Merab. I pray thee, O my father, do not look
Upon us with such wrathful countenance.
We, of a verity, did speak of thee,
Yet only in desire of thy love
Which, even now, the words upon thy lips
Do witness hath forsaken us too long.

Saul. Have I then spoken of ye any ill?

Michal. Assuredly thy speech hath smitten us
With great reproach and scoffing.

Saul. Do not heed,
My daughters, all my foolish utterance
Or gather up against me in your minds
The tares begotten of a troubled soul.
Ye are as goodly fountains in my courts

Which yield sweet waters—when ye keep the faith
And duty which ye owe me. But, beware,
Lest ye betray the fulness of my grace.

[*A Servant entereth.*]

Wherefore dost thou return again to me?

Servant. My lord the king, thy servant asketh leave
To speak to thee. The king remembereth
That, certain days ago, his spirit sank
Within him and his countenance was changed,
Whereat, with all the love I bear to him,
I was so bold of speech that I did say
“Behold, an evil spirit troubleth thee
Which God hath sent. Let now our lord command
Thy servants which attend before thy face
To, wheresoe’er they may, seek out a man
Who is a cunning player on an harp,
And it shall come to pass, when yet again
The evil is upon thee, sent from God,
He with his hand shall play and, at the sound,
Thou shalt be well.” Then didst thou say to us
“Provide me now a man that can play well
And bring him to me.” Whereupon replied
One of thy servants of Judean birth,
Saying, “Behold! I, even I, have seen
A son of Jesse, the Bethlehemite,
The keeper of his flock upon the hills,
Who hath, as all men know, a cunning hand
In playing, is a mighty valiant man,
A man of war and prudent in his speech
And hath a comely person, and the Lord
Is with him.” Upon this thou didst command
Thy messengers to Jesse with the words

“Send to me David who is with the sheep.”
Thy servants tarried not to do thy will,
And now, behold, the lad whom thou dost seek
Standeth without.

Saul. Bid him come in to me.

[The Servant bringeth David before Saul.]

Art thou a son of Jesse who is known
To good report in ancient Bethlehem?

David. I am, my lord the king, the youngest son
Of this thy servant who doth send to thee,
In humble token of obedient love,
Some bread and wine together with a kid—
As offerings for favor of the Lord.

Saul. No gift which telleth of a faithful house
Is humble to the king. Art thou the lad
Which hath a cunning hand to play the harp,
As one within my court doth testify?

David. I play, my king, full often, but my hand
Hath won no other cunning than is taught
To me by deep desire of my heart
For some exalted language, pure and sweet
Beyond the rude expression of the tongue.

Saul. Thy hand shall strive henceforth, if so it may,
To teach this language to a troubled breast
Sorely distressed by some evil thing
That hath a secret door to enter it,
Slaying the watch and making every strong
And trusted weapon of its ruler vain.

David. If thou, my king, hast any cherished friend
In such a woeful case, thy servant's harp
Will minister its little to his pain
And, peradventure, since its melodies

Have given cheer to shepherds in the night
On Judah's hills and solace to the grief
Of some in Bethlehem who mourned their dead,
It may, beneath the spirit of the Lord,
Uplift the heart which thou dost think upon
From its captivity to secret foes.

Saul. My witless lad, what cherished friend have I
In all the earth? Since I am crownéd king,
No man would dare nor would they suffer him
To give the sorrow of his heart to me.
Woe seeketh charity or equal lot,
My majesty doth bar the path of love;
I have but subjects now, no friends remain.

David. Then, O my lord, perchance some child of thine
May, through the ministration of my hand,
Be comforted by music's healing sound.

Saul. Nay, David, thou dost wander from my thought;
My sons are in the tents of Israel
To study strife, which is the lot of kings,
And bow to might in lack of love's command;
My daughters are these maidens we behold
In pleasant ease, the dial of their years
Being so lighted by the mid-day sun
Of royal blessing, tarrying beyond
The shining witness granted Joshua,
That not a shadow yet hath crept about
The circle of their idle golden hours.
They only know the weariness of rest
And, while the earth doth labor, thus recline
Upon their silken couches as the young
Of Egypt's sacred birds in golden bonds,
Acquainted but with rich captivity.

David. And can it be, my gracious lord the king,
That any soul, begotten to the joy
Of palaces, to honor at their feasts,
To curtained pillows and the garnished wealth
Of chiefest rooms, to these embroidered robes,
To guarded courts and quick authority,
May yet conceive of weariness or care?

Saul. ✓ O youth, thou knowest not the heart of man.
It is a polished shield in which his eyes
See nothing of the good of present days
Through yearning for the future or the past
Which it portrayeth and, in looking long,
Forget its use to guard his breast secure.
Behold thy king. Thou seest me a man
Who, from the shoulders up, doth overtop
The stature of his people. If it be
That God proclaimeth not, in every wise,
That He hath shapen me to wear a crown
And guard it mightily, the hands of men
Have given token in these purple robes
That I am set above them to command,
As is their manner, lest it come to pass
That God should not create unto their mind
The creature of their choice. Thus in thine eyes
I twofold am a king, and, in the vain
Imagination of thy youthful heart,
I wear a double diadem of joy.
Alas, fair shepherd, thus the simple thought
Springeth where'er the vision leadeth it
As doth a captive dove which knoweth not
Its wings are shortened and which fluttereth
Confounded to the earth. Behold, O youth,
The troubled breast whereof I spake to thee

Is even mine, and all thou countest choice
And goodly in my palace, which is yet
But mockery to Gaza's scornful eyes,
And all thou seest of obedience,
Of trembling slaves and faithless hirelings,
Of lowly salutations in the courts
And in the highways, pomps of fighting men
And trailing robes of seers—all this is vain
To give me consolation here within.
Wherefore I bid thee play upon thine harp
That I may prove thy skill.

David. My lord the king,
I hasten to obey thy royal will,
But, as the harp remaineth with my sack,
Beside the gate, I go to fetch it thence.

[David goeth forth.]

Saul. What think ye, gentle daughters, of the youth?

Michal. He hath a goodly countenance to see,
Beyond his humble sort.

Merab. Aye, verily,
I know no man of greater comeliness
O father, save thyself.

Saul. And dost thou make
Comparison of me with husbandmen?

Merab. Let not my words provoke thee, for I count,
As all men do, thy face the goodliest
Of Israel and Judah, but I give
The praises meet for God's high handiwork
Although His skill hath wrought but common clay,
For, surely, is the youth of better grace
Than any in thy courts.

Michal. Than all but one.

Saul. Doth Merab love?

Merab.

My father, heed her not.

It is sufficient that I do not know
A comelier, save thou, in Gibeah,
Howbeit there are some so faithful here
And full of gentleness that I esteem
Their countenance above a chosen host
Of ruddy shepherds such as this of thine.
Give him to Michal who hath made no choice.

Michal. I thank thee, Merab, but I have no flock
Which he might tend, save certain silly men
Who do beset my path and weary me
With flattery and idleness of speech.
Of other watchful servants lack I none.

Saul. My haughty child, what if it were thy lot
To wed a shepherd?

Michal.

Of a verity,

Thou mockest me, my father, thou dost know
The comeliest of men could never loose
The girdle of my pride, save he were king
Or vanquisher of kings. Aye, thou dost smile
And I interpret all within thy heart.
For thou, the valiant and exalted head
Of Israel and Judah, thou the son
Of mighty Kish who ruled in Benjamin,
The son of Abiel, of Zeror son,
And others many; thou wouldst suffer not
Thy daughter, did she wish it, to forget
The honor of thy house and of thy crown.
And, lo, I am no whit less proud than thou.

Saul. Thy words besit a child of Saul begot.
Aye, truly am I king and do defy
This ancient prophet Samuel who fain,
In all the arrogancy of his years,

Would raise his voice against me. Who is he,
That he should fashion kingdoms at his will
And threaten by the Lord to cast me out
As he were Moses come to life again?
The rather should I curse his hoary head
And smite him for his lying prophecies,
And thrust him from our borders that, henceforth,
No man in Israel may fear him more.

Michal. I pray thee, O my father, turn aside
Thy wrath. Behold, the youth approacheth us
And it were wise to hide thine enmity.

[*David entereth.*]

Thou hast thy harp, O David, let thy hand
Give excellent assurance of its skill,
For now the time hath come wherein the soul
Of Saul, the king, is troubled and hath need
Of all thy cunning. Play and tarry not.

[*David playeth.*]

Saul. This is sweet music, it is passing sweet,
Delighting all my soul. I seem to see,
As thou dost play, green branches spreading forth
Like branches of the almond and the vine
About thy harp and ever growing strong,
And climbing on the carving of the walls
And up the pillars, putting forth their buds
And blossoming, and every cluster there
Of virgin blossoms hath a different hue,
All gladdening the eyes, and ever thus
Sweet blossom joining blossom until thou
And these fair maidens and their happy king
Seem all entangled in the drifting web

Of some bright vision, strange and beautiful,
As evening stars amid a fleecy cloud.

David. My heart rejoiceth in the fuller joy
Of God's anointed and his gathered peace.

Saul. Aye, thou hast smitten that within my breast
Which troubled me. Lo, it hath fled away
And I arise refreshéd and am well.
Thou shall abide with me to drive it hence
If it return to vex me, for my heart
Is very favorable unto thee
To prove the measure of a king's reward.
But tell me of thy life, that I may give
Befitting station to thee. Is it so
That thou hast had a part in Israel's wars?
For so they say of thee who know thy youth.

David. My lord, it oftentimes hath come to pass
Amid the hills of Judah, that a band
Of glorying Philistines hath come up
With purpose to despoil us in a night,
Whereat thy servant, being from a child
Acquainted with the byways roundabout,
Hath gathered other sons of Bethlehem
And led them on the heathen suddenly
To their confusion.

Saul. If it so hath been
Thou art sufficient for a greater war
And worthy higher station at my side
Than harper in my household. Be henceforth
My armor-bearer, known before the host
For days of battle and, unto my soul,
Sweet harper for assurance of its peace
And healer of its dark infirmities.
Let us go hence, that I appoint for thee

A messenger to seek thy father's house.
Thus shall he unto Jesse say for me
"I pray thee, give me David of thy sons
To stand before me, bearer of my shield,
For he hath gainéd favor in my sight."

[*Saul and David go forth.*]

Merab. It seemeth, verily, as if the youth
Whose love we held in scorn, hath carried hence
No less a spoil than all the royal heart
Our father weigheth out so jealously
When we beseech his favor.

Michal [aside]. It is strange,
Yet I do marvel less, since I have heard
The cunning of his hand. Can such a skill
Be joinéd to his comeliness of face
In any shepherd? Have my eyes betrayed
In estimating, as the chosen ones
Of earth, the youth I see within the court,
Vainglorious of raiment and of wealth
They gather not, of loud and foolish speech
And followers of heathen vanities;
While I am blind to all the goodliness
Of those of humble lot? Or is the face,
Which yet abideth in my charmed sight,
The noble visage of some kingdom's heir
Who cometh secretly in mean attire
To know whereof his spies have made report
And be a hidden messenger of love?

Merab. What sayest thou, O Michal, in a voice
So low that scarce thy heart can hear thee speak?
Art thou beguiled, also by the skill
Of this fair shepherd?

Michal. Merab, hold thy peace.
What should I have to do with such as he?
Thou knowest not my pride. The sweetest harp
Of all the earth would vainly strive with it.
I wait a sceptre or a mighty sword.

PLACE II. The roof of Jesse's house at Bethlehem. Jesse and Jessica. Their sons Nathaneel, Raddai and Ozem, their daughters Zeruiah and Abigail; and Abishai, Joab and Asahel, sons of Zeruiah.

Jesse. Belovéd children, how do I rejoice,
When thus the cool of day doth end your toil
And gather you again about my feet,
That weary youth and feeble age may share
An intercourse of bounty to the mind,
Ye telling that which ye have seen and heard
Without the gates of Bethlehem, and I
Committing to your ears the deeds of men
Beyond the gates of your remembrance hid,
And to your hearts that profitable fruit
Of wisdom which doth ever ripen best
In ancient gardens where the soil is fed
With oft decaying hopes and vain desires.

Nathaneel. Thy life, O father, verily hath been
A fair and fruitful garden in the peace
And meditation Bethlehem bestows
To such as seek a blessing from her hills.
Therefore should we thy sons about thee stand
As walls to shelter thee from every blast
Bearing, as they do bear the ripened fruit,
Thy mellowed wisdom in our memories
Until our strength is covered by its shade
And dutiful obedience doth wear
The purple honors of thy trusting love.

Jesse. Thy words are very grateful to mine ears,
Nathaneel. Be it mine with lengthened days,
When I do talk in fond remembrance oft
Of Bethlehem, the ancient Ephrata,
This place which so encompasseth my life,
Whose households are as kindred to mine own,
Whose elders were companions of my youth,
Whose valiant men these feeble arms have held;
Be mine to wander not in empty words
Or glory in an arrogance of speech
As doth a locust in the noontide sun;
The rather may these lips a harvest yield
For succor in the winter of your need,
Such harvest as, in mightiness of wealth,
Did Boaz, father of my father, reap
From great possessions in the days of peace.

Nathaneel. So shall our hearts esteem thy counsel true.
But, since thou speakest of the many fields
Of Boaz, are they not diminished
In this thy heritage without the walls?

Jesse. Aye, verily, my son, for grievous wars,
The hard oppression of the Jebusites
In former days, the losses which I knew
When men did what was right in their own eyes
Before there was a king in Israel;
These things did waste a part of my estate,
But lesser revenue hath come to us
From lack of men to labor, since the king
Hath gathered up the people's strength to war.
Behold, Eliab and Abinadab
And Shammah of my sons are with the host
Already, and I know not, day by day,
Who yet among ye may remain to me.

Moreover, have I lost the helpful toil,
Good Zeruiah and sweet Abigail,
Ye faithful daughters of my happy spouse,
Of Suri and of Jether who have left
Your love and these their children to exchange
Their plowshares for the flesh dividing sword.
Hence is the greater portion of the land
Which Boaz reaped but pasture for the flock
Thy youngest brother David hath in care,
And the wide threshing floor, which was a pool,
For all the valley's golden streams of grain,
Hath wasted more from insufficient use
Than from the persecution of the flail
And dances of our harvest jubilee.

Jessica. How great a man was Boaz in his day
And generation! Yesterday at eve,
When thou didst tell the wisdom of his ways
Yet once again to Zeruiah's sons,
To Joab here, Abishai, Asahel,
I harkened as it had been all unknown
So pleasant and so gracious was the tale,
And, Jesse, didst thou never see his face?

Jesse. Alas, my spouse, the heaviness of years
Was upon Boaz what time he begat
My father Obed to uplift the name
Of Mahlon from the dead. Thereafter soon
He went a ransom for the life he gave
And Obed scarcely knew his countenance.
But Ruth I well remember in her age,
No longer beautiful, save in the pure
Eternal loveliness which meekness wears.
And oft I sought her counsel, often heard
Of all the goodly deeds which Boaz wrought,

The proven excellency of his heart.
She told me, furthermore, of divers things
Concerning our wars of ancient days
When Judges went about among the tribes
To strengthen them before their heathen foes;
And yet of Moab, her forsaken land,
Did she instruct me, and, when all her years
Were measured, did she bless me in the name
Of Israel's God, to whom she steadfast clung;
Whereby I count the increase of our house
An answer to the voice that Boaz loved.

Jessica. And wilt thou not make record of her words,
My honored Jesse? Surely to the ear
Her tale resembleth music from a lute
At eventide of harvest, when the men
Have put their sickles by, when maidens rest
Beside their gleanings, and pursuing doves
Fly to and fro between the vineyard towers.

Jesse. Thou speakest well, beloved. It is good
That generations yet to come should know
The tale of faithful Ruth and how the Lord
Doth recompense the stranger who forsakes
His idols to abide with Israel.
This will I do and, if I lack the skill
By which our seers and cunning scribes have made
A record of our journeyings and wars,
I, peradventure yet, through simple words,
According to the manner of our lives,
May aid the soul of Ruth to glean again
A fuller sheaf amid the hearts of men
Than in the fields of Boaz. Such a task
Will give my mind anointing unto peace

And thrust the terrors of the war away.
But, now, my children, let mine ears attend
Your tidings since the morning sacrifice.
Thou, Zeruiah, as thy mother's loved
And helpful daughter, eldest at my side
Shalt first narrate what thou hast done to-day.

Zeruiah. Behold, O father, little in reward,
For, with the duties of the house fulfilled,
I listened to the pleadings of my sons,
Joab, Abishai and fleet Asahel,
Going with them between thy barley fields
And onward, they disporting by the way
Like kids about their dam, until we came
To Rachel's grave, as oftentimes before,
And by the pillar Jacob set thereon
I paused in meditation of the dead.

Jesse. The bitter cry of Rachel at her end
Hath been a fruitful prophecy of woe,
For of her seed is little Benjamin
Who giveth to the land her stubborn king,
The tribe diminished, as ye may have heard,
Before the days of Boaz by the sword
Of Israel, in judgment of their sin,
When Gibeah, perversely proud, withheld
Her children of Belial who had wrought
Abomination in the woman's death
Whom Bethlehem to that sad Levite gave.
Wherefore the Lord did purpose to destroy
The land in its iniquity and she,
The sinner sacrificed to sin more vile,
Who, living, led no man save in the night,
Did by her severed flesh call forth a host
To make the grief of Bethlehem their own

And purify compassion in the blood
Of Gibeah, cast out and desolate.

Nathaneel. The woman's end was righteous punishment
For all her evil deeds.

Jesse. Nay, O my son,
Reproach her not too hardly, lest thy sword
Should smite its keeper. Such an evil name
Did Rahab bear who gave to Boaz birth
Having, by timely favor to the spies,
Survived with all her house in Jericho
And dwelt secure and wed in Israel.

Raddai. Did not the Levite thou hast spoken of
Come to our gates from distant Ephraim,
What brought him hither, thinkest thou?

Jesse. Perchance,
He at the first but rested on his way
To ancient Hebron, which, as thou dost know,
Is city of the Levites by our laws,
And, meeting with a maiden young and fair
Of countenance, whose father's gracious words
Commended her, he lingered and he loved.
Yet, if thou hast with due attention read
Those precious scrolls the prophet Samuel
Gave unto David when he came to us,
Thou shalt remember that in olden days
Levites must needs have dwelt in Bethlehem,
For even out of this our city went
That Levite Jonathan who lived a priest
In Micah's house at Ephraim and thence
Departed with the Danites for their land.
But do not further let my ancient tales
Of Bethlehem keep all your voices mute

And make you weary of a father's tongue.
What hast thou done, sweet Abigail, to-day?

Abigail. My toil hath been but what my willing hands
Have found to do, good father, in the house,
Those duties which, among the sons of men,
Are void of reputation, yet provide
The comfort of the earth; those daily tasks
Which, like the stitches of our raiment, gain
No commendation while they hold secure,
Worthy before the cunning broidery
Of king's apparel in the strain of life,
But are accurséd when at length they yield.
Moreover have I labored with the lads
In plucking wool brought unto us at eve
By David's shearers from thy burdened flock.
This, with the former portion, shall be spread
To-morrow on the housetop to the sun,
That it be dry against the market day.

Jesse. I would that all had toiled as faithfully.
Nathaneel, hast thou aught that I may hear?

Nathaneel. My father, Jesse, there is no new thing
To tell to thee concerning thine estate,
But I have further tidings of the war,
For, lo, at noontide indolently came
A caravan of Hittites down the vale
Returning unto Hebron and they spake,
The while their camels drank about the well,
Of what they heard at fair Jerusalem.
There, in their mighty citadel secure,
The Jebusites were glorying that soon
The strength of Israel should pass away.
For, though the proud Philistines are opposed
At Ephes-Dammim by the host of Saul,

Encamped in Elah's valley to defend
The hills of Judah from the spoiler's hand,
It seemeth that so long a tarrying—
Nigh unto forty days, as we do know,
While each awaiteth vantage—doeth harm
To Israel which hath not treasured up
The needs of equal war and knoweth now
The weariness which multiplieth fears.

Jesse. Assuredly the battle, which delays
Its bloody presence in the straining thought
Of mighty captains, soon must come to pass.
Then shall the coiled serpents of their dreams
Strive in opposing hosts for mastery,
And woe be unto us if Saul should fail.
How well do I remember when at first
I heard the tidings of this bitter war.
One morning as I sat beside the gate
Amid the elders, lo there entered in
A messenger, breathless, faint from weariness,
Who, with the coming of his speech again,
Did publish to us that Philistine kings
Had taken courage from a score of years
To avenge their mighty slaughter by the hand
Of Jonathan, that goodly son of Saul,
At Michmash, and were once again come up
In multitude to battle. Yet they came
No longer by the vales of Benjamin,
In which their thousands perished, but essayed
Our borders by the way of Shaaraim
Which leadeth from the cities of the plain.
Then tidings of Philistine warfare spread
Throughout the land and all its fighting men
Were called unto their king and led in haste

To guard the western gates of Judah's hills.
Thereat a terror spread throughout the land,
Not only of the heathen, but because
The mind of Saul again was wrought upon
By that dark spirit which possesseth him,
Which men mistrusted would confound the skill
Of Abner and the sword of Jonathan
And bring us into bondage as of old.
This trouble of the king, as ye do know,
And all the evil ways of Gibeah,
Were ever burdens unto David's heart
Which sank within him and, although awhile
The playing of his harp gave peace to Saul,
Yet, when he wearied and I had a need
Of David for the sheep, then was he glad
To make exchange of royal vanities
For this his humble life on Judah's hills.
Alas! poor Judah, now thy peaceful land
Shall know the desolation and the grief
Of raging war. The Lord of hosts defend
Thy households from the foe, thy fruitful fields
From the destroyer and thy altars pure
From Baal's desecrating sacrifice.
Henceforward may the God of Joshua
Be Lord in equal measure of the king
And guide his understanding to the hurt
Of all who rise against us, lifting up
The sword of Jonathan to smite again
The heathen that their numbers melt away.

Ozem. If there be war, then shall our brethren fight
And proud Eliab, valiant and strong,
Will bring us goodly spoil from heathen tents.

Jesse. Rather, my son, be glad if from the strife
Thy brethren come in triumph unto us,
Unharm'd as when they hasten'd to the host,
Since riches are but dearly bought in blood.
And let us send, that we may comfort them,
Some token of our love, and furthermore,
Unto their captain such remembrance due
As may obtain his favor and his care,
If aught befall them in the battle's rage.
If this be done, it asks no tarrying,
And one of ye, my sons, must serve my will.

Raddai. O father Jesse, let me be thy choice.

Nathaneel. Nay, father, I am eldest born of these
Who yet remain beside thee, let me go,
For in the peril of my journey thence
I better can dispute unruly men.

Jesse. For this same cause I need thee near at hand
And all my sons who know the daily toil
About my fields and vineyards, which do lack
Sufficient husbandmen to reap in haste
If Saul require grain to feed the host,
Or to remove, upon an evil day,
Our harvest from the spoiling of the foe.
It seemeth best to send our youngest born,
For David's flock is so diminished
By what we have already sent the king
That any lad may tend them, and my son
Hath strength of arm and a courageous heart
Beyond his years. To David will I trust
This service to his brethren in the camp,
And, since the king doth know him, he, perchance,
May gain them some promotion in the host.

Jessica. But Jesse, since the prophet Samuel
Hath wrought for us so marvelous a thing
As he hath done in leading David forth,
Of all the seed of Israel, for his hand
To sanctify with God's anointing oil—
Since such a blessing crowns our youngest born,
Wilt thou again send outward from thy face
The beauty of his presence to withstand
The violence of enemies, the harm
Which, even in the host of Saul, may come
From evil arrogance of brutish men,
Wilt thou submit him to the deadly spear
Of secret foes who linger in the land,
Lying in wait for men at lonely ways,
Or have him know, if God is wroth with Saul,
The terrors of a stricken host in flight?

Jesse. Yea. I will send our David to the camp.
If God so much hath loved him, He will guard
This comfort of our age with surer care
From every ill thou fearest, and, although
His first departure from us came to naught,
The Lord, perchance, will manifest His might
And purpose in the blessing Samuel gave,
By leading David forth a second time
From this our humble life in Bethlehem
To more exalted place in Israel
Than he hath found by playing to the king.

Jessica. But, inasmuch as God hath caught away
Our seventh son since Samuel came to us,
My soul doth cleave the more exceedingly
To this our youngest born. O spare the lad!
Why will ye yet again direct his feet

Amid the snares of pride from which his soul
Hath once, in all its meekness, made escape?

Jesse. I pray thee cease, my ears in vain attend
Or it is David's step upon the street.

[*David entereth.*]

My greeting to thee David, my beloved.

David. My salutations unto thee and all.

Jesse. Hast thou not tarried somewhat in the way
Beyond thy wont, my David? I am loth
To lose thy presence here at eventide.

David. Thy love hath reckoned justly, yet I plead
Sufficient cause that I did stay so long.
This I will set in order for thine ear.
Yet first, if thou hast water from the well
Beside the gate, that sweetest well of all,
Give me to drink, for I am sore athirst,
And I will wait a little space for food
And washing of my feet.

[*They give David water to drink.*]

Jesse. Speak on, my son.

David. Scarce was the dawn above the eastern hills,
When I awoke from sleep and bid the lad
Who, as thou knowest, hath his part with me,
In watching o'er the flock throughout the night,
To go his way. Then followed in my path
A thousand eager feet in southward course
Along the rocky heights and as the light
Sprang joyful onward from the radiant east
To break the purple shadows of the hills
And spread on grassy slopes to drink the dew,
So spread my sheep in quest of sweeter food,
Or came to me in answer to their names,

Or, at the admonition of my dogs,
Did gather closer, trembling in alarm,
Like bubbles 'mid the whirling of a stream.
Thus did I go before them, now upheld
In body by the shepherd's staff I bore,
And now in spirit by my joyful harp,
Praising the gracious Maker of the light
Until there seemed an angel host above
The hills of Bethlehem to share my song.
At length I came, before the sun was high,
To Etam, yet I sought not to go down
Into the village but, erewhile my flock
Lay on the hillside, watched by one I knew
Who also kept his sheep, I gat me up
Into the fastnesses of that great rock
Which, like a soldier's bruised helmet, sits
Upon the mountain top defiantly.
There mighty Samson found a hiding place,
As well ye know, to flee Philistine wrath,
When he had made the foxes messengers
Of fire to their vineyards and their corn
And smitten his pursuers hip and thigh.

Jesse. Aye! I was one of those three thousand men
Of Judah who, in fear of all the rage
Of the Philistines who oppresséd us,
And knowing not Jehovah's purposes,
Went up to Etam and gave Samson bound
Unto their host. Aye! well I know the rock.
There was the refuge of this Nazarite
Who, in despite of all the lusts of strength,
Was yet a chosen servant of the Lord
And guided by His spirit. Tell me more.

David. Lo, then I thought of Samuel the seer,
Alike a judge and purer Nazarite
Who followed after Samson and who gave
Anointing unto me with holy oil
And blessing of the Lord and counsel deep
And strange beyond the power of my mind
To comprehend its wisdom or intent.
But lo! as I considered it the more,
My soul sprang up as if from slumbering,
It seemed to shout, "Press onward and the Lord
Will arm thee in the measure of thy need
Like Samson to prevail against an host."
In such like meditation and resolve
Did I descend, scarce knowing how I went,
To join my sheep—a shepherd once again
Yet, in my heart, a shepherd nevermore.
As noon was yet to come, I wandered on
Toward the south, all witless of my flock,
Save when their bleating checked my hastening feet.
Once, while I tarried for them, did I lift
My voice and harp in song, but this was stirred
By violence of zeal so new and strange
That soon my hands had snapped the trembling strings
Leaving them withes to bind my spirit mute.
Then from my girdle, with a fretting hand,
I drew my sling and found a foolish joy
In bringing to the dust the unclean birds
Which, ever and anon, with troubled cries
Circled the air above me, sorrowing
My presence on the mountain of their rest.
At length by noon I gained Tekoah's hill
And tarried and I ate with shepherds there,

And afterwards I went with them to see
A mighty cave, whereof they boasted much,
High in the mountain side.

Jesse. Assuredly,
The cave thou sawest is Adullam called.

David. Such is the name thereof and I was glad
To search its cool and darkened ways and gain
Refreshment from the heat of outer day
And quietness for my disturbéd soul.
Behold, if it should ever be my lot
To flee before a persecutor's wrath,
Thence would I hasten to abide secure
Until the fury of his rage were spent.

Jesse. The Lord protect thee, David, from the need
Of such a refuge as the conies know,
Or wild beasts of the mountain. In a time
Of desolation would I rather seek,
With all my house, a refuge in the land
Of Moab, asking favor of her king
In memory of Ruth who came from thence
To win the love of Boaz. Hast thou else
To tell us of thy welfare when again
Thy feet did seek the way to Bethlehem?

David. Alas, my father, aye. I met a man
Who told me he had sojourned in the camp
Of Israel, which yet in Elah's vale
Doth, for a little, check Philistia's host.
But they are mighty which have now come up,
And every one is arméd to his choice
And eateth of the fatness of the plain,
While Israel and Judah, in the lack

Of equal food or armor, vainly wait
For some advantage to abate their fear.

Jesse. This have I heard, my son, in Bethlehem's gates
And, lest thy brethren who do serve the king
Should suffer ill from any lack of food,
I have determinéd to send to them
Upon the morrow from our humble store,
Such nourishment as best may serve their need.
And, furthermore, since thou hast been with Saul,
And mayest gain his favor for my sons,
Thou art my choice to go unto the camp.

David. I thank thee, O my father, this exceeds
The fullest expectation of my heart.
Now, peradventure, may the Lord provide
My soul a path to bear the unarmed strength
Of Samson into battle as mine own;
Now may the blessing Samuel bestowed
Make me a place to serve Jehovah's will,
Accepted in the sight of Israel.
And, father, if I should not soon return?

Jesse. Thou hast been chosen by the prophet's hand.
If God hath taken, how may I withhold.
I bless thee and I give thee to His care.

PART II.

PLACE I. The Camp of Israel by the Vale of Elah. Eliab, Abinadab, Shammah and Soldiers. The Philistine Camp is seen on a mountain beyond.

Abinadab. Eliab, dost thou verily believe
The long awaited battle is at hand,
Or doth the king but set us in array
To put away the fears which come with sloth
And make a valiant presence in the sight
Of the Philistines?

Eliab. Truly, know I not,
For lo these forty days we stand apart
Above this curséd valley, either host
Despising the possession which it hath
Yet daring nothing more. Our fighting men
Are bidden to and fro, aroused at night
When none assaileth us, and made to toil
Like bullocks in the fiery heat of noon,
That we be worthy war's extremity,
While in humiliation of our strength,
There cometh out before us twice a day
This mighty son of Gath who lifteth up
His voice upon yon mountain to defy
The strength of Israel.

Shammah. Aye, and to make
Of every stripling in Philistine tents
A scoffer in the shadow of his shield.

Abinadab. Would God, the shout of Saul might now
be heard
From mountain unto mountain and from off

Their barren sides shake down the mighty hosts
Of Baal and Jehovah as great rocks
Rent by the frost or flood which, thundering, slide
To crash together in the vale below.

Shammah. The king, perchance, hath knowledge of
the foe

Which maketh him take counsel of delay,
Or else he tarrieth to mend some need
Of fitting weapons or sufficient skill
Amid his thousands, which we know not of.

Eliab. Nay, though our weapons are but gathered
spoil

Of later wars and in the heathen camp
Aboundeth all things, what we most do lack
Is the example of a valiant king,
For Saul no longer walketh in the strength
My youth beheld a score of years ago
When these Philistines trembled at his sword
And Amalek was smitten. Verily,
Some trouble wresteth with him, turning back
The courage of his heart before his foes.
But who is this which cometh to the front
In shepherd's raiment, followed by one
Who leads a burdened ass? Behold the youth
Hath strength of stature and a ruddy face.
Is it not David?

Abinadab. Surely it is he.

[*David entereth.*]

David. All hail, beloved brethren, I rejoice
To find ye all unhurt and in the strength
Of heaven's keeping.

Abinadab. Brother, hail to thee.

Eliab. Hail, David.

Shammah. Doth our father Jesse well
And all the household we have left behind?

David. All goeth well with them and I do bear
Their loving salutation to your ears,
And this, moreover, Jesse sendeth you
Wherewith the ass is burdened, ten fresh loaves,
An ephah, at the least, of parchéd corn
Are your provisions, also have I brought
Ten goodly cheeses as an offering
To him who leads your thousand.

[Confusion among the Soldiers.]

What is this?

How cometh such dismay to Israel's host?
I thought to see a band of valiant men,
And these are children.

Abinadab. They do flee before
The coming of Goliath.

David. Who is he,
Can these Philistine dogs a Samson breed?

Abinadab. He overtoppeth Samson.

David. As the reed
May overtop the thorn tree.

Abinadab. Hear me yet.
His height is full six cubits and a span
And on his head he hath a helm of brass
And he is arméd with a coat of mail
Whereof the weight of brass is, by repute,
Five thousand shekels. He hath greaves of brass
Upon his legs, a target wrought of brass
Between his shoulders. Like a weaver's beam
The staff is of his spear, its iron head

Weighing six hundred shekels, and his shield
One beareth on before him. Even now
From yonder mountain doth he come again
To shout defiance forth in Elah's vale.

[*Goliath entereth beyond.*]

David. Aye, I behold the scoffer who hath dared
To set himself in arms against the Lord.
Alas, that such a mighty man should wear
The armor of unrighteousness to strive
Vainly against the seed of Abraham
And Saul, the Lord's anointed.

Shammah. Harken all,
Goliath shouteth to us.

Goliath. Why are ye
Come out to set your battle in array?
Am not I a Philistine? Are not ye
Servants of Saul? Choose ye a man for you
And let him hasten to come down to me.
If he be able now with me to fight
And kill me, then will we your servants be.
But, if against him I should here prevail
And kill him, then shall ye henceforth become
Our servants, serving us. I do defy
This day the armies of all Israel.
Choose ye a man and send him forth to me
That we may fight together.

David. Who is this
That thus defyeth? Shall the hosts of Saul,
The armies of the God of Joshua,
Of Gideon and Samson in his might,
Be wanting in a man to smite the pride

Of this Philistine which reproacheth us?
Stay, men of Judah, wherefore do ye flee?

1st Soldier. Have ye not seen this man that is come
up?

He cometh, surely, Israel to defy.

2nd Sold. And it shall be that he who killeth him
The king with many treasures will enrich.

3rd Sold. And give his daughter to him, and will make
His father's household free in Israel.

David. What, say ye, shall be done unto the man
That killeth this Philistine and doth take
Away reproach from Israel? For who
Is this uncircumcised Philistine fool
That he should, in the blindness of his pride,
Defy the armies of the living God?

Eliab. And what is this to thee, thou shepherd boy,
That thou dost parley with our fighting men?
Why camest thou down hither and with whom
Hast left those few sheep in the wilderness?
I know thy pride, the naughtiness of thine heart,
For thou art come down that thou mightest see
The battle.

David. Brother, what have I now done
To be admonished? Is there not a cause
In doing what our father bade me do
To bring thee this provision? Would I else
Have tarried by so wearisome a charge?

[*To Soliders.*] What, say ye, shall be done unto the man
That killeth this Philistine who defies
The gathered armies of the living God?

1st Soldier. The king will give great riches unto him

2nd Sold. Saul's daughter shall he have to wife.

3rd Sold.

And more,

His father's household shall be free from tithes
And honored in the gates of Israel.

David. If I should do the bidding of my soul
And, by the blessing of the Lord, prevail,
What unto me were riches of the king
Since I have seen how little joy they share?

A gift of that fair daughter I beheld
With foolish eyes when I abode with him,
This striketh nearer to my beating heart
And shameth all imaginings of hope
By its revealed delight. Yet, doth the dream
Abase my soul to covetous desires
Befitting not its high endeavor now.

What said they else? "The vanquisher shall find
His father's house made free in Israel."

Aye, this doth in a purer bond unite
The service of my father and my God.
This pledge fulfilled would verily be gift
Meet for the love of Jesse, to exalt
The horn of his rejoicing in his years,
Supplying, as a harvest after rain,
That latter yearning of the heart of age
For gratitude from those its toil hath reared
And honored rest when it can strive no more;
Such gift would render unto him again
The freedom which his wisdom hath bestowed
By patient teaching and protecting love,
Whereby I have escaped the hidden snares
Of heathen gods, of indolence and pride,
Of envy and contention, and have found
Freedom and strength of body in the toil

Of field and pasture, liberty of mind
In steadfast search of what is wise and true
And mighty to control the hearts of men,
And freedom of the soul in pure desires
From meditation of Jehovah's word.
Thus hath my father's tender love released
My spirit from the evil tithes of youth,
And, God assisting me, he shall be free
In feeble age from every tithe to care.

[*Saul, Jonathan, Abner, Adriel, Phaltiel, Ishbosheth and
Armor Bearers enter.*]

Behold the king. How doth his noble soul
Wage with some evil spirit fiercer strife
Than doth his arm against Philistine foes.
My countenance may cheer his heart again
And gain me grace to do the thing I would.

Saul. Is there no man in all mine armed host
To raise the sword for this blasphemer's woe,
Who, during forty days in Elah's vale,
Hath lifted up his voice to Israel's shame?
This boaster is a poison to my blood
And bitterness of spirit.

Jonathan. Give me leave,
I pray thee, O my father, to go forth
And strive with him. Perchance a swift assault
Would give me vantage of his mighty spear.

David. This, of a surety, is Jonathan,
Who tarried ever faithful in the camp
When I was with the king in Gibeah.
I thank the Lord that now mine eyes have seen
The face of him who by his single arm
At Michmash wrought confusion to our foes.

How valiant is this prince of Israel.
My heart already cleaveth unto him,
And, were I not the heir of Jesse's love,
Fain would I be his son whom I behold.

Saul. How wilt thou yet provoke me, Jonathan?
Dost thou believe the rashness of thy sword
At Geba and at Michmash, when the foe
Unwittingly were smitten, will avail
Against this mighty champion of Gath?

Jonathan. Thy hand is hard upon me, nor didst thou,
My father, count my life so dear a thing
At Gibeah. Let me be rather slain,
If so it be, by this Philistine foe
Than by thy will.

Saul. Nay, hear me, O my son,
Thou art the eldest born of Israel's king,
Nor should thy royal blood be vainly shed
To Israel's confusion, for the strife
Is terrible of issue. Should mischance
But cast thee for a moment in the dust,
This gazing multitude who cherish thee
Would straightway flee in uttermost despair.
Therefore I bid thee tarry at my side.

David [*aside*]. My arm may yet gain favor with
the king
To smite the pride of this invading host.

Saul. Would God that I were mighty to destroy
This boaster, but the hardihood of youth
Hath left my blood and all the weighty cares
Of my disturbéd kingdom compass me
To my destruction in so great a strife.
O valiant Abner, in thine eyes I see

A better courage, yet thy sealéd lips
Like striving keepers of unruly men
Do justly to withhold thy fruitless prayers,
For thou, belovéd uncle, art alike
With me, unfitted by a weight of years
To meet this mighty champion of Gath.
Thy proven strength, sufficient to dismay
A lesser foe, would here be counted vain,
And, in thy fall, my spirit would lament
The taking of a higher citadel
Than God hath wrought in flesh, for He hath set
An heart within thee goodly as an oak
Of Bashan, and a mastery of war
And wisdom to confound mine enemies
And all who offer counsel from their fears.
Thou, Phaltiel, art silent. It is well.
Such strife befitteth not so light a frame,
And, even in his boasting, hath the man
Of Gath a greater mightiness than thou.

Phaltiel. My lord the king, thy servant doth not lack
In valiant parts, but is of goodly house
And surely may not go forth to contend
With a rude fellow of no more repute
Than cometh of six cubits and a span.

Saul. Enough of this. Thou art as delicate
In spirit as in flesh, and, with the host,
Valor alone hath any dignity.
But Adriel, hast thou no will to serve
And set thyself against Philistia's boast
When my fair daughter Merab is reward
For him who vanquisheth? Have I not heard
Thy lips extol her excellence and crave

The grace of my compassion for thy heart?
And wilt thou now with feeble knees proclaim
Thy love an empty thing when, by repute,
The man who loveth hath no chain of fear
And worketh miracles to force the way
To his delight?

Adriel. Thou speakest grievous words,
My lord the king. I love thy daughter well,
As thou hast testified, and I would strive
With any other foe for this reward
And brave all peril having hope beyond,
But it were my destruction to contend
With this Goliath in his mightiness
And weight of armor and surpassing skill;
Dying would rob me not alone of bliss
In Merab's sweet possession, but the joy
And daily strength of love in which I live,
For sighing love is better than vain death.
Moreover, should the land of Israel
Again be brought to bondage through my fall,
Barzillai my father and his house
And all who in Meholah's walls abide,
Would weep alike in sorrow and in shame,
My kinsmen being outcast from the land.
I cannot go. I am indeed afraid.

Saul. And must I look throughout this host in vain
For any one to smite this heathen down
Who maketh us a byword in the earth?

1st Soldier. My lord the king, 'tis but a little space
That I did hear a shepherd in the camp
Demand "What shall be done unto the man
Who slayeth this Philistine?" And he spake

So boldly that our hearts grew strong again,
Dreading his scorn above Goliath's voice.

2nd Soldier. Behold he talketh with his brethren there.

Saul. If there is one bold man amid the host,
Though he be shepherd, let him come to me.

[*Soldiers fetch David.*]

[*Aside.*] This, verily, is one whose presence lacks
But riper years and strengthening of wars
To make an enemy have fear of him.
Why, shepherd, hast thou wandered from thy flock
To lose thyself amid the wolves of strife?
Yet do I err, for these are rather sheep
Which flee when yonder dog doth bark at them.

David [aside]. Alas, already hath the king forgot
My countenance. Thus is it that the poor
And humble serve to cheer a little space
Some mighty one and then, as raiment rent,
Are cast away. Yet, peradventure, this
My shepherd's gear, or, on Judean hills,
The burning of the summer sun at noon
Hath changed the gentle harper of the court
In fine apparel, that he be not known.
The thing is well, I will not speak thereof
But strive in altered face for mightier name.

Saul. What aileth thee, thou shepherd? Doth my
crown
Or terror of Goliath stay thy tongue?

David. Neither thy crown, my gracious lord the king,
Whom I do reverence, nor yet the dread
Of this proud heathen whom I do despise,
Withheld my speech, but an infirmity
Of meditation which hath passed away.

Let no man's spirit fail because of him.
Behold, thy servant will go forth and fight
With this Philistine.

Saul. Nay, against the man
Thou surely art not able to go down
To fight with him, for thou art but a youth
And he a man of warfare from his youth.

David. Thy servant David kept his father's sheep,
And there came down a lion and a bear
And took a lamb out from amid the flock.
And I went forth and smote the lion down,
Delivering the lamb e'en from his mouth.
And when he rose against me, by the beard
I caught him, and I smote and slew him there;
Thy servant slew the lion and the bear,
And this uncircumcised Philistine now
Shall be as one of them, in that he hath
Defied the armies of the living God.
The Lord my God that hath delivered me
Out of the lion's paw and from the bear,
He will deliver me out of the hand
Of this Philistine.

Eliab [to his brethren]. Hear ye what he saith,
My brethren? Such a madness can but bring
Reproach upon our father Jesse's house.
Let us depart, ere we do suffer shame,
And share among us this provision sent
Before Philistine spoilers gain the camp.

Saul. Thou art the boldest, surely, in mine host.
Go, and the Lord be with thee in thy need.
Yet thou art lacking armor. Tarry here
A little space until they bring to thee

The harness of thy king, for scarce is less
The breadth of these thy shoulders than mine own,
And such a valiant heart deserveth guard
Of royal breastplate and may quit itself
With higher zeal beneath my helmet's pride.

[Men fetch armor and arm David.]

How doth each portion of this good defense
Seem graven with some history of my wars
And bloody overthrow of those who stood
In bitter hate a score of years ago,
Task masters over fallen Israel.
Then had our bands, in all their sorest need,
No weapons save their tools of husbandry,
And, where we spoiled our fallen enemies,
We gathered up a newer might from death.
What goodly prize was this strong coat of mail
Of one Philistine, who, in his conceit
Of equal stature, vainly strove with me;
How humbly did this brazen helmet bow
Before my spear and yonder shield become
A laver for the stricken foeman's blood;
And that good sword wherewith they gird the lad
Assuredly hath severed Hebrew flesh
Ere I did teach it sacrifice to God.

[David essayeth to go in Saul's armor.]

David. My lord the king, I cannot go with these,
Their burden and their fashion hinder me,
And this thy sword is stranger to my trust
Until I bear it in a lesser strife.
I thank thee, but I have not proven them.

[David puts off the armor.]

Behold this leathern thong. Its simple strength

My hand so surely guideth to my will
That cunning vultures, flying o'er my lambs,
Have fallen in sudden anguish by the fold.
And this good sling, if God shall fight with me,
Is all sufficient to abase His foe.
Behold thine eyes shall see Jehovah guide
The arm which trusteth in His holy name.

Saul. May He defend according to thy word.

[*David goeth forth.*]

Abner. Wilt thou, O king, not stay the witless youth?
This is not war but rather sacrifice,
And we shall all be bondsmen by his fall.

Saul. Nay, he shall go. Some spirit moveth him.
Whose son is this, O Abner, knowest thou?

Abner. As thy soul liveth, O king, I cannot tell.

Saul. Inquire thou whose son the stripling is.

Jonathan. No soldier, verily, of Israel's host
Hath greater courage, more exalted zeal
Than this young shepherd who doth hasten down
To meet Goliath in his armed strength
By Elah's vale, with but a staff and sling.
Behold he stoopeth at yon little brook,
Diminished in dread of bloody flow,
To choose him stones for battle. Now, at length,
He lifteth up himself and passeth on
Beyond the brook and, watchful, draweth nigh
To the Philistine, who doth still descend,
His shield upheld before him, to await
Some chosen champion of Israel.
Lo, now Goliath gazeth roundabout
As wroth at finding none to strive with him.
He, peradventure, thinketh that the youth

Is some poor shepherd searching for his flock
And straying witlessly between the hosts.
But now he looketh on him. Harken ye.
How doth the valley measure forth his scorn.

Goliath. Am I a dog that thou dost come to me
With staves? May Baalim and Ashtaroth
Consume thy vitals with their hidden flame
And make thee impotent and palsy thee
And wither up this maiden skin of thine
That women may despise thee and thy gods
Forsake thee. Come to me and I will give
Thy flesh unto the fowls of the air,
Thy bones unto the wild beasts of the field.

Jonathan. The Lord accurse this champion of Gath
And, by some wonder of His power, spare
The youth without defense who standeth yet
With marvelous assurance in his course.

Saul. Harken, the youth doth also lift his voice.

David. Thou comest to me with a sword and spear
And with a shield, but I come down to thee
In name and power of the Lord of hosts,
God of the armies of all Israel,
Whom thou hast now defied. This day will He
The Lord, deliver thee into my hand,
And I will smite thee and take thine head from thee,
And I will give the carcasses of the host
Of the Philistines which are roundabout
This day unto the fowls of the air
And to the wild beasts of the earth to eat,
That all the nations of the earth may know
There is a living God in Israel,
And all this great assembly which beholds

Shall know the Lord Almighty saveth not
With sword and spear: The battle is the Lord's
And He will give you into our hands.

Jonathan. Did ever man such great defiance shout.
Though hope was wrapped and buried in my breast
It cries from out the tomb. The Lord who gave
My sword at Michmash strength to spread dismay
Amid the thousands of our enemies,
May yet add greater glory to His name
By this brave shepherd. Lo, Goliath's spear
Doth tremble in his rage, he cometh on
As he would crush the stripling at a blow;
Nor doth the shepherd yet show aught of fear,
But rather hasteneth, aye he doth run
Toward the scoffing army of our foes
To meet the mighty champion of Gath
As doth an eagle fly into the storm.
Behold, his hand doth search within the bag
And taketh thence a stone. He slingeth it.
May God protect the youth if he hath failed.
Nay, see Goliath, as a tower swayeth
What time the earth doth quake, he bows, he falls
With all his crashing armor to the ground.
Let alleluiahs rise. What deed of war
Exceedeth this the shepherd's hand hath wrought?
[Much shouting in the host.]

Saul. The Lord is with us. Well may Judah shout
At its redemption. Abner, stir thyself.
Hast thou a trance?

Abner. I cannot trust mine eyes.
Is great Goliath verily cast down?

Saul. Aye, even as the mighty Dagon fell
Before the captured ark when it was set
Within his temple, so upon his face,
Is great Goliath fallen, and behold,
Since he may not be broken as the stone
Of Dagon's image, lo, the youth doth run
And stand on the Philistine, and he draweth
His mighty sword out of the sheath thereof
And slayeth him and cutteth off his head.
Harken! As thunderings do follow flame
From heaven, so doth great lament succeed
In yonder host the lightning of the sword
Which endeth all its glory. Tarry not
O Abner! let thy trumpets sound pursuit.
Already the Philistines flee away.

Abner. Thy words are wise, O king. Ye trumpeters
Blow loose the eager host of Israel.

[*Trumpets sound.*]

Saul. And hasten thou, O Jonathan, my son
With these thy shouting thousands, that they slay
The heathen to their borders, letting none
Escape to vex the hills of Judah more.

Jonathan. Nay, let their captains lead my thousands
forth,
For, had they staves, our terror-stricken foes
Would, on the flood of this adversity,
Be scattered utterly. Let others glean
After the bloody reaping of the lad,
Such easy glory, but I pray thee now,
My father, let me tarry in the camp
To see this shepherd, for he lifteth up
The bloody head which Gath shall see no more

And cometh hither. Peradventure God,
As to Manoah and to Gideon,
Hath sent an angel in a form so fair
To give deliverance to Israel.

Saul. Aye, by my soul, for such a mighty deed
Proceedeth not from any shepherd's heart
And stranger things than this have come to pass.
A terror taketh hold upon my bones.
I cannot now, alone, await his face,
Tarry, then, here beside me, Jonathan,
And Abner, stay thou also to discern
What manner of a man the youth may be.

Abner. If so thou wilt, my king, but even now
The enemy doth vanish from his camp
As frost at the uprising of the sun,
And any captain who is wise in war
Planneth not only how to overcome,
But how to turn the moment of success
To best advantage, giving no release
From terror and confusion to the end.
Therefore I leave thee for a little space
To give rejoicing profitable tasks
And bid a just pursuit until I come.

[*Great shouting of Soldiers.*]

Behold the shepherd draweth nigh us. Now
The host doth shout his glory to the hills
Which joy with Israel. It is but meet
That I should also go to greet the youth
And bring him to the gladness of thy praise.

[*Abner goeth forth speaking with his Captains.*]

Saul. And can it be an angel of the Lord
Approacheth us?

Jonathan. Nay, father, for my zeal
Beguiled imagination and the dream
Is hard to put aside, but dost thou not
Remember, when they sought the lad for thee,
He stood amid his brethren?

Saul. Thou hast said,
And I rejoice thereat, for in my breast
Rebellious spirits dwell which shun the gaze
Of angels, and my fear hath passed away.
Lo, Abner hath already ordered well
A swift pursuit and bringeth at his side
The champion this hour bears to fame.

[*Abner bringeth David before Saul.*
All hail to thee, fair shepherd, who hast wrought
Deliverance, by cunning of thy hand,
To Israel and Judah.

David. Gracious king,
Without the Lord my strength had been in vain,
But He to-day hath made me very bold
And shielded me in peril and His will
Guided the stone I slang that it did smite
The great Philistine in the forehead bare
And sank into his forehead and he fell,
As thou hast seen, upon his face to earth.
Behold his head which showeth in its front
A bloody testimony to my words.

Saul. This countenance, which scattered hosts in life,
Hath hardly lesser terror in the blood
And paleness of its dead malignity.
Let it be lifted up amid the camp [To Soldiers.
That all the host may see our chiefest foe
And, in his fall, gain strength for lesser deeds.

And do ye strip his body of its weight
Of brazen armor, this shall be the spoil
Of him whose arm hath put our shame away.
Bear it to yonder tent beside mine own.
Whose son art thou, thou valiant young man,
And by what name may all men honor thee?

David. I am the son of one in Bethlehem,
Thy servant Jesse, who hath given me
The name of David.

Saul. Truly "well beloved"
To Israel. And hath he other sons?

David. My lord the king, I have six brethren,
Three being present with thee in the host
And three abiding yet on Bethlehem's hills.

Saul. Then mayest thou continue at my side
And not return unto thy father's house,
For I have need of courage such as thine
To give me heart for Israel's heaviness.
And, furthermore, that this which thou hast done
Have just reward in all the people's sight,
I set thee over these my men of war
Who serve beside me and defend their king.
Whereof, in all their duty, Jonathan
Will give thee knowledge. Now must I depart
With Abner to maintain the swift pursuit
Of these accurséd heathen of the plain,
These whelps of whom thy hand hath felled the sire.
Already have our thousands passed beyond
The empty tents on yonder mountain side,
And, lest they tarry soon or turn away
From greed of spoil, we will go after them.

Moreover, I would see with mine own eyes
The ordering of this Philistine camp.

[*Saul, Abner, Adriel, Phaltiel, Ishbosheth and all
Attendants go forth.*]

Jonathan. If the king's lips had uttered greater praise,
My heart, O valiant shepherd, yet would find
Some language worthy to exalt thee more.
My two score years survey thy mighty youth
As if thou wert a vision quickenéd
Of what my soul did purpose long ago
When hope accorded all and faith was bold
And zeal to serve Jehovah and restore
His people from their grievous bonds awoke
My spirit in the night and scourged my days;
Wherefore the Lord was gracious unto me
And fought with me at Geba mightily,
And gave to me the love of Israel.
This have I still, but in these latter times
I had begun to mourn my heart of youth
As lost forever, and, behold, to-day
I find and love it living in thy breast,
And God hath manifested to my soul
In all the excellency of thy skill,
In faith which bindeth doubt to servitude
Of prophecy, in zeal which scorneth fear,
That thou dost wear a glory from on high
And art appointed to defend with me
The kingdom of my father from its foes.

David. My lord, thy gracious words do magnify
An hundred fold my worth, I did but serve
The wrathful indignation of my heart
In slaying him who scoffed at Israel

And sought to shame the Lord's anointed king,
Who, living, made our lives to be despised.

Jonathan. Yet was there not in camp an armed man
But counted life more precious than the lot
Of going down to meet this son of Gath,
And art thou not more valiant than us all?

David. Thyself didst seek to stand before the spear
Of this vain boaster, for with mine own ears
I heard thee plead this favor of the king.

Jonathan. I sought it but as standing in the breach
Of Israel's dishonor, to proclaim
That, if we might not overcome our foe,
One, at the least, was not afraid to die.
Yet, though I spoke without assuring heart,
I joy that thou wert nigh to hear my voice
For thus, O son of Jesse, all the love
That knits my soul without a seam to thine
Hath its response already in thy breast.

David. My lord, before I saw thee, many years,
When I was yet a lad in Bethlehem,
And made inquiry of the former wars
Which troubled Judah in its chosen land
And little Benjamin upon its hills,
My father Jesse told me, oftentimes,
The wonders that the bow of Jonathan
Had wrought amid the foes of Israel
When thou didst cross the valley secretly,
Where Bozez and where Senah lift their peaks,
And climb the hill of Michmash and confound
The craft of the Philistines, until fear
Spread like a flame amid their troubled host
And God did bid the earth to clap her hands

Rejoicing with His people. Thus I knew
Of all thy valor and my heart's desire
Was that I might behold thee face to face,
Not knowing I should yet attain thy love.

Jonathan. Thou son of Jesse, what may be thy name?

David. David, my lord.

Jonathan. Call me no more "my lord"
But "Jonathan" and count me in thy heart
An elder brother in the day of peace
And, when the battle rageth, ever near.

David. Thy soul is very gracious, Jonathan,
When most I need an elder brother's love,
But thou shalt see that I do value well
The heart thou givest and my arm shall strive
For thee and thine henceforward faithfully.

Jonathan. Thy words are good. Let this be covenant
Betwixt thy soul and mine as brethren true,
That each may aid the other's righteous cause
With all his strength and steadfastly defend
His body from the foe, his honest name
From evil persecution of false tongues
And jealousy of power; that in our days
Of fainting or of tribulation sore,
Each may the other cherish tenderly
And strive to loose, if in a captive's bonds,
And, if the one be stricken unto death,
The living shall be kinsman to his seed;
And further let us covenant that life
Be given, whether nigh or far apart,
To God's united people, that they dwell
Untroubled in the land He giveth them.
So swear we by Jehovah Who doth reign
Alone the living God, the King of Kings.

David. So shall it be, my brother Jonathan,
And may the Lord be witness to my heart
That it abideth steadfast to my vow
Throughout the days which He shall portion me.

Jonathan. Let this be token, David, unto thee
That I do clothe and arm thee with my love
As now I give thee raiment that I wear.
Put off thy shepherd's cloak and take my robe
And these embroidered vestures which henceforth
Adorn thy station as the king hath said.
Now bind this girdle on, hang thou my sword
Beside thee and accept this faithful bow
Which in the strife of Michmash won thy heart.

David. Nay, Jonathan, how may I take from thee
So great a gift, despoiling thee of all?

Jonathan. It is a token. Yonder in my tent
Are many garments yet and weapons rare.

David. But what have I to give thee in exchange
That equaleth thy bounty? I possess
Only a staff and sling to offer thee,
Yet this Philistine's armor I forgot,
Which is my spoil. It may be worthy thee.

Jonathan. Nay, keep the armor, give me but thy sling.
It is a royal gift. I ask no more.
It shall proclaim throughout all Israel
That David, son of Jesse, loveth me.

David. And if it also witness thou dost love
The humble shepherd, shall it not attain
A greater glory than its deed to-day?
Aye, forasmuch as winning such a friend
Exceedeth slaughter of an host of foes.

[*David and Jonathan embrace.*]

PART III.

*PLACE I. A Street of Gibeah with Porch of the Palace of Saul.
Much people rejoicing.*

1st Youth. Hail fellow, I salute thee. Surely these
Are days wherein the men of Gibeah
May well be merry.

2nd Youth. If thou utter not
A lesser truth, thou art a righteous man.

1st Youth. Nay, by the gods, give no such name to
me.

Thou knowest that my lewdness equals thine.

2nd Youth. I thank thee, boy, and what thou lackest
yet

I shall impart to thee this very night
If rioting sufficeth for our lusts
And thou hast shekels for festivity.

1st Youth. Thou art too honest. Wherefore should
we pay

For pleasure when a merchant that I know
Who selleth joyous wines and hath within
His house fair daughters, trembleth at my tongue
And giveth what I will lest I should burn
His vats and make his vineyards desolate?

2nd Youth. Then, by the grove of Ashtaroth, I own
Thou art the better fool, and it is well
Thou hast a chosen pasture, for to-night
The city will be given to the host,
And, when our fighting men do break their fast,

There will be merry rioting and rage
Of passions we were simple to dispute,
Lest blood flow out more freely from the wounds
Of jealous swords than wanton wine flow in.

1st Elder. Good neighbor, thinkest thou the host of
Saul

Will reach our gates at noontide? Verily
My aged limbs are weary.

2nd Elder. It is said
That those upon the towers even now
Behold it in the valley drawing nigh.

1st Elder. It needs must be, for certain days are spent
Since we have had glad tidings of the war,
Marveling at the shepherd who hath cleft
In twain the tower of that living wall
Which moved against us.

2nd Elder. Now lift up your eyes
To people on the housetops. Is there not
Upon their faces, turned to the south
The rising of a sun of joyfulness?

1st Merchant. What hath befallen thee that thou art
wroth
When Gibeah rejoiceth? Have a care
Lest thou art numbered with the Jebusites.

2nd Merchant. Nay, I am of the faithful, but I frown
To think of these unprofitable wars
Which waste the land with fire and with sword,
And make the people poor with grievous tithes,
Robbing us of our careful husbandmen
To fill destroying hosts, and putting end
To traffic when we fear to send abroad

Our caravans of merchandise and yield
To Jebusites and Hittites all our gain.

1st Merchant. Lo neighbor, this is finished and we
joy
In long enduring triumph.

2nd Merchant. But, behold,
Peace bringeth hither only idleness
And joyous uproar and my servants all
Are in the highways.

1st Merchant. Thou art not content
In peace or war, but tarry yet awhile
Until the fever of this joy is gone.
Those who are wise can profit by the time
Which others waste and, while the people shout
And wait the night for rioting and wine,
Let us, upon the passing of the host,
Make ready for a caravan to bear
Again the riches of our land and skill
Through Judah, now delivered of its foes,
To Hebron's gates and Egypt, thence to bring
Such full exchange of goodly merchandise
As shall provide our war-diminished sacks
With shekels overflowing.

1st Woman. Look beyond,
Upon the royal porch there cometh forth
The Queen Ahinoam to wait her lord.
How meek and patient is her countenance
Amid its joy.

2nd Woman. And mark ye at her side
The gentle Merab and the haughty face
Of Michal.

1st Woman. And beholdest thou, apart
From these, the lovely Rizpah gazing forth
Above this great and joyful multitude
With dark and searching eyes?

2nd Woman. I will be sworn
She thinketh less of Saul than of her sons,
That gentle twain who, in the kingdom's need,
Forgot their youth to venture war's distress.

1st Woman. May God return them to her bosom's
peace.

Maiden. Have ye a place of vantage here to see
The coming host?

2nd Woman. Yea, Rachel, stay with us
And thou shalt see the king and Jonathan
And Abner and the mighty captains all.

Maiden. But I would see the shepherd who hath slain
That giant of the heathen. All men say
That he is very fair to look upon.

1st Youth. Aye, little maiden, thou art not alone,
For, by the hair of Samson, have I heard
To-day a thousand lips as sweet as thine
Clamor to get a lodgment, though it be
As narrow as a pretty dove might seek
Beside a pillar or upon a wall,
If they could but behold the countenance
Of this same lusty shepherd we attend.

1st Scribe. The host approacheth. Now the people
shout
Upon the housetops at the southern gate
And up along the highway as a wave
Doth roar upon the salt shore of the sea.

2nd Scribe. Aye, what a goodly thing it is to view
A nation, from a leprosy of sloth
And doubt and pride and covetous desire
And evil doing, rise and cast away
The scales of its pollution, springing forth
Like a fair woman blushing with the joy
Of long desired love and uttering
The faith of all her being in her song.

[Soldiers draw nigh.]

1st Merchant. Behold, indeed, the forefront of the
host
Which cometh back rejoicing from its war.

[Many Men bearing spoil pass by.]

2nd Merchant. These, surely, in their portion bear
the spoil
Of all that heathen foe the Lord hath slain.
Hast thou throughout thy days beheld such store
Of treasure and apparel, weapons rare
And jeweled ornaments? One reckoneth
In vain to value them. A thousand times
Ten thousand shekels would not count the cost
Of these Philistine riches.

1st Merchant. Dost thou now
Confess that war is not so great a woe?

2nd Merchant. Aye, but the Lord hath blessed a
shepherd's skill
And not a warrior's. Howe'er it be,
We shall be fools henceforth if we do fail
To purchase from these fellows in their wine
The choicest of their spoil at half its worth,
And better far, while yet they thirst for gold.

1st Merchant. Then let us haste to borrow and secure
Not only fourfold bounty but the lack
Of shekels to oppose us.

[*Saul in a chariot passeth amid his Captains.*]

1st Scribe. Turn thine eyes,
For Saul upon a golden chariot,
The gift of death from some Philistine king,
Approacheth us amid his fighting men
With royal pride. Do thou regard him well
And tell me if, beneath his countenance,
Some evil hideth not. I never yet
Have seen the rainbow of a people's joy
Upon so dark a cloud. What thinkest thou?

Men shouting

Let the king live. Saul hath his thousands slain.

2nd Scribe. This greeting, verily, should cheer his
soul.

Men answer

Saul hath his thousands slain. Long live the king.

1st Scribe. Yet, as he rideth on in majesty
Of stature 'mid his horsemen, doth his face
Give not a token that he harkeneth
To royal salutation.

2nd Scribe. Bend thine ear
To those who shout behind him. What is this
Which stirreth them? So greatly doth prevail
The tumult of their zeal, I seek in vain
To hear the language of extolling tongues
Amid the sound of tabrets and the joy
Of diverse instruments. Behold the hands
Which play are hands of women. Verily
Hath Gibeah made choice of all the fair

And lovely of her daughters for the band
That danceth in the way.

1st Scribe. They go to meet
The mighty shepherd David who hath wrought
Deliverance to Israel. But hark,
Now we do hear them singing as the sound
Of silver cymbals 'mid the roar of men.

Women singing
King Saul hath slain his thousands.

1st Scribe. Do ye hear?

Women answering
But David hath his tens of thousands slain.

Women singing
Aye, Saul hath slain his thousands.

2nd Scribe. Let them heed
In such rash words the fury of the king.

Women answering
But David hath his tens of thousands slain.

1st Scribe. Now do we know the darkness of the
cloud

Since we are set betwixt it and the sun
To here discern the colors of the bow
Which spanneth all the sky of Israel's pride
And whispereth the peril of its hope.

The peace of Israel is far away,
For strife within is breeding ere the blood
Of heathen foes upon our swords hath dried.

1st Elder. Behold, the chariot of Saul doth make
An end of all its journeying from the vale
Of Elah, and before the royal house
It stoppeth in the gate.

2nd Elder. What is there more?
The multitude doth hide him from mine eyes.

1st Elder. The king ascendeth now unto the porch
Where Queen Ahinoam doth hasten forth
With her fair daughters to salute their lord.
They fall upon his bosom. For a space
They cling together in the bonds of joy
As God were minded out of four to mould
A new creation.

2nd Elder. Would it were the will
Of Him who doeth all things, presently
To fashion of the king a wiser man,
Partaking thus the patience of his spouse,
And Merab's duty, Michal's zeal of youth.

1st Elder. Alas, thy nice imagination fails
For Saul doth put away his fairer parts
And taketh on his troubled self again.

2nd Elder. And seest thou good Rizpah?

1st Elder. Aye, behold.
She boweth down before him and the king
Saluteth her and hasteneth within,
And Abner, who hath followed after him,
Doth tarry for a space to give her cheer.

Women singing
The king hath slain his thousands of the foe.

Women answering
But David hath his tens of thousands slain.

1st Youth. A goodly mischief lurketh in the song
Of all these comely women.

2nd Youth. Nothing more
Is lacking to assure us merry nights,
That Belial may roar, for now the king

Will wink at violence and these fair maids
And matrons who have mocked him in their song
And feigned desire often in the dance,
Defying us behind their dignities,
Shall now, like Shiloh's maidens when the men
Of Benjamin, our fathers, lay in wait
And bore them off in eagerness of lust,
Cry out in vain, when we do break their doors,
For any to defend their comeliness.

1st Youth. I shall be with thee then, but hold thy
peace

And let us see this David who hath won
The favor of our women and is nigh,
Or I will nevermore believe my ears.

2nd Youth. And what is this a servant of the king
Doth bear before him?

1st Youth. By the mighty horn
Of Joshua, it is Goliath's head.
That giant out of Gath, as thou hast heard,
Whom David slew. How horrible to see.
And these who follow after do divide
The burden of his armor as they may.
Behold the spear two weary servants bear
Upon their shoulders. See the weight of brass
In shield and shining breastplate, in the greaves
And, yonder, in the folded coat of mail,
And in the bloody helmet of the dead.
But look ye at the measure of his sword!
Lo, I am fain to shout with women now
In honor of this shepherd who hath met
And vanquished such a foe.

2nd Youth. But, by report,
He is as righteous as the ancient seer.

1st Youth. I care not what he be, but being thus,
There may be something strong in righteousness
And I will, notwithstanding, shout for him.

[*David and Jonathan enter.*]

1st Woman. This, verily is David. This is he.
O dost thou mark him, Rachel, hath he not
The presence and the glory of a king?

Maiden. Let me behold him. He is good to see
Beyond the expectation of mine eyes.
He walketh in the spirit and the might
Of one who overcometh.

2nd Woman. Yet his face
Betokeneth no foolishness of pride
Or boasting in the tumult of his praise.

1st Woman. Nay, rather doth the prince of Israel's
heart.

Belovéd Jonathan, who at the side
Of David goeth, in his praise rejoice,
Wearing the countenance of victory
In honor of the shepherd who hath kept
The perfect meekness of a mighty soul.

2nd Woman. It hath been said to-day that, while the
host

Stood in the terror of Goliath's scorn,
That Saul did promise unto any man
Who overcame the champion of Gath,
Abundant riches, adding thereunto
The royal favor of his daughter's hand.

Maiden [aside]. Would that I were a daughter of the
king

Or that, a moon ago, had enteréd
Into my bosom some familiar shape
Of divination to direct my feet

Unto the pastures of Judean hills
Whereon I might have sought this shepherd out
Pleading his care and telling him my love;
But now, O heart, a great sea flows between.

1st Woman. Behold, they turn aside from following
The path of all the host to seek the door
Betwixt the pillars of the royal house,
Whereat attend the servants of the king
To do them reverence and bid them pass
Unto the cool delights of marble courts
Within the palace. There awaiteth them,
I do adventure, every honor meet
For Israel's deliverer and joy
Which all the love of Saul and of his house
Can lend unto the sweetness of repose.

Women singing
King Saul hath slain his thousands.

1st Scribe. Yet again
The women sing and none reproacheth them.

Women answering
But David hath his tens of thousands slain.

2nd Scribe. Let it sing on, that company so fair,
Extolling him who resteth in the gates
Of Gibeah, the jubilant and strong,
A captain over all its mighty men;
For not alone his valor hath cast down
The boast of Gath, the strength of Ashkelon,
Delivering our borders from their hand
And teaching them the bitterness of death,
But, in the mighty act which he hath done,
The daughters of our people are redeemed
From violence of cruel enemies
And horrible captivity of wars;

Aye, in a moment, 'twixt opposing hosts
His mighty arm hath given virtue sleep
And innocency blessing. Strike your harps
Ye happy mothers, steadfast in your lives
And diligent in every goodly thing
That maketh gladness in your house abide,
For, henceforth, ye may leave your sleeping babes
Without a care. Step onward in the dance,
Ye maidens, though ye nevermore may know
The greatness of the peril overpast;
Let all your tabrets and your timbrels sound
With such a holy triumph as the voice
Of Miriam awakened. Sing ye pure
And beautiful of Israel, extol
The excellency of the shepherd's heart,
For by his faith your joy is lifted up
And in his glory is your pathway free.

PLACE II. The Court of the Palace of Saul.

[David entereth.]

David. Yea, It was here that, as a shepherd boy
And knowing not the craft about a throne,
I brought my harp and comforted the king
In vain a little season, it was here
I knew the fair princesses of his house
But as an hireling and yet, withal,
When none had need of me and I returned
To Bethlehem, the haughty face of one
Was only what I longed to still behold.
I left the court unprofitable, free
To humble life, and now I come again
In bondage to a happy nation's praise
And mighty expectation. Verily,

It seemeth passing strange to think upon,
Yet, had I need of testimony still
That all is not a vision, it is found,
For Saul's proud daughter cometh unto me
And I shall read my station in her eyes.

[*Michal and her Handmaidens enter.*]

Michal. The daughter of the king saluteth thee,
Thou champion of Judah, and her heart
Rejoiceth that, upon this radiant day,
Befitting morrow for triumphant deeds,
Her greeting first succeedeth yonder sun
Which yet hath rendered honor to thee long.

David. Fair Princess, as thou sayest, I have risen
Early from slumbering, for, since my youth,
The sun hath been companion of my watch
Above my father's flocks and I have known
His waking might and golden indolence,
Not as ye on the housetops know his face,
But from the misty pinnacles of hills;
Therefore I rose to greet him once again
In this fair place where he remembers me
And, having given salutation fond,
He heraldeth thy coming to mine eyes.

Michal. And art thou, mighty David, verily,
None other than the youth who once was fetched
To play upon an harp before the king
And in his sight found favor and abode
A season in the palace?

David. I am he.

Michal. Behold a spirit moved me when I saw
Thy presence, yesterday, amid the host
And unto Merab said I, "This is one
Our eyes have looked upon in other days,"

Whereat she pondered and there came to me
Assurance of thyself, yet spake I not,
Resolvéd to await another hour
For testimony out of thine own mouth
To 'stablish me, or music from my hand
To make denial of thy person vain.

David. Fair Princess, there is naught I would conceal,
In triumph, of my youth's humility.
Rather do I rejoice that thou hast strung
Amid the pearls of thy remembrance sweet
This bead of amber, but I ask of thee,
Since it appeareth that the mind of Saul
Hath taken yet no knowledge of my face,
That thou withhold the thing a little while
For me to prove the comfort of my harp
Again before him.

Michal. Be it as thou wilt,
And since the bead of amber hath become
So bright a gem, exceeding all the rest,
I shall restring the necklace of my pearls
And hang its greater glory in their midst.

David. Then shall it nearer to thy bosom wait
To know the inner secrets of thy heart
And rise with exaltation of thy joy
And, with thy sighing, fall in heaviness,
Sharing thy sorrow and, amid thy feasts,
Trembling at praise of thee lest, in thy pride,
It may become but amber once again.

Michal. Thou knowest, valiant David, I am proud,
But wherefore hast thou cause to trust me not
Since thou hast sprung above pride's utmost bound
And won the love of all in Israel?

David. Thou sayest all?

Michal.

Aye, if I speak for them.

David. O gracious Princess, I distrust thee not.
It is myself I doubt in daring thus
To wear so soon the speech of lofty place
Whence I may fall as speedily, yet here,
Since thou dost open all the peaceful fold
Of thy young heart, forgive me if I seek
With reverence of one whose faithful arm
Hath ever guarded gentleness, to pass
Within the gate and take each gracious word,
As if it were a lamb, unto my breast.
How may I tell the fulness of my joy?
Behold, when I was yet of little worth
To any man and sat before the king
To play my harp, I saw thee at his side
As one doth from his prison see a star,
And rather had I thought that, at my will,
The sea would be uplifted as a cloud
To leave the wealth of Sodom at my feet,
That Gerizim should, from its holy height
Be cloven to its base to give me spoil
Of all the brass and iron in its heart,
Than that mine ears should ever know the bliss
Of Michal's praise, her favor—

Michal.

Yea, her love,

If royal place compelleth me to lead
Thy speech to what I would, to teach aloud
What thou hast taught in silence hitherto,
But which, henceforth, the freedom of my tongue
Doth bind to loyal duty of thy lips
When none but I may hear thee. Thou art brave
When thou dost hate, be brave in love as well.

David. Thy love doth magnify an hundred fold
The bravery of hate and to my heart
Giveth a lion's strength for coming war
With perils glorious. But, lo, beyond
The king, who both exalts me and dismays,
Approacheth with the Queen and Jonathan
And others of his house.

Michal. I will depart
A little space and guard thy past awhile,
Yet henceforth, O my David, thou shalt be
No longer "shepherd" to my happy thought
But only mighty chieftain of the host,
The pride of Judah and of Israel.

[Michal goeth out.]

[Saul, Ahinoam, Jonathan, Abner, Adriel, Phaltiel, Ishbosheth, Merab, Rizpah and others enter. The King goeth in silence to a seat. Others bow to David from a distance. Jonathan draweth nigh. Michal returneth.]

Jonathan. My brother, I embrace thee. Let me speak
A little to thee privily. The king
To-day is in possession of a dark
And troubled spirit. One hath said to me
Who, yesterday, beside his chariot rode,
That, when the women sang, as thou didst hear,—

David. Alas, I heard with terror what they sang.

Jonathan. The Lord protect thee. At their foolish joy
The king was very wroth and thus he spake,
"They have ascribed unto David's hand
Ten thousands and to me they have ascribed
But thousands, and what more can he possess
Except the kingdom?" David, have a care

To answer gently while my father's heart
Is turned from its true and noble place.

Ahinoam. Come hither, brave defender of our host,
Thy king hath passed the weary night alone
In bitterness of spirit. Surely thou,
Whose arm hath striven with such loyal zeal
Before the foe, canst banish from his soul
Some hidden sorrow.

Saul. Woman, hold thy peace.
Wouldst thou bring torches when the angry flame
Consumes thy house or, when thou art athirst,
Drink molten brass to slack thy throat's desire?

Ahinoam. I pray thee, Saul, my spouse, to put aside
This woe which giveth madness to thy speech
And bringeth great dishonor. Give me heed
As thou dost love me, as thou lovest those
Whom have I nourished, crush this evil thing
Which ravisheth thy reason, lest the voice
Of Israel reject thee and thy heart
Be hardened as was Pharaoh's to destroy
Thyself and all about thee.

Saul. O my soul,
Art thou alive in righteous enmity,
Or art thou dead indeed and given up
To evil thoughts within thee, as endures
The head of proud Goliath which was hung
But yesterday at entering of the gate,
Where all may see the hungry worms which creep
In its corruption; even as in my brain
Do woeful prophecies thus surely feed
With ceaseless appetite upon its hope,
Or love or pride or royal dignity?

Ahinoam. My lord the king, I do beseech of thee
To keep thy soul in peace.

Saul. Teach thou to those
Whom no man envieth, the law of peace
Which maketh thee a stream amid the reeds,
But tell it not to kings or such as guard
A treasure in their keeping, be it gold
Or fertile land or power of the sword,
Or some fair woman or the stolen love
Of those whom they beget to be betrayed.
Speak not, for now the wizard in my breast
Communeth with me and a darkness falls
Upon my eyelids. Peace, let all be still.
The shadow of a soul is roundabout
Which cometh from the regions of the dead.
O spirit, make me know the mysteries
Which dwell beyond the womb, beyond the grave,
Whether they be of glory or despair,
And I will serve thee, giving thee my soul
To crown in heaven or consume in hell
Rather than strive with doubt or anguish more.
Lo, thou hast heard me, mighty one unknown.
The darkness passeth from me to its place,
The clouds are parted, all that doth confound
The soul beneath its bondage to the flesh
And make it halt and blind, is burnt away
By the consuming fires of the truth.
Wait but a little. Now the flames divide
And, lo, a vision cometh to mine eyes.
Behold an altar in an open space
And nigh thereto is one who slumbereth,
A mighty man appareled as a king,

And, at the altar's side, an ancient seer
With wrathful countenance regardeth him;
He taketh up the knife of sacrifice
And cometh nigh the king as if to slay,
But stoopeth down and, under where he lies,
Doth plant the blade and water it with blood.
Straightway it groweth up a mighty sword
Piercing the purple raiment and the side
Of him who wears a crown. He wakes, he cries,
He seeks to rise in vain, for bonds unseen
Prevent him and his hands do seize the blade
And treacherously guide it to his heart.
O make lament, ye sons of Benjamin,
And humble ye yourselves ye house of Kish
For thus destruction cometh in a night
And shame doth break the glory of your sword.
Judah shall strive with ye and overcome
Philistia shall smite ye. There shall rise
From desolate Gilboa woeful sound
Of battle and the plain of Jezreel
Shall tremble at the anguish of the slain,
And one shall die alone defiantly,
And, in the house of Ashtaroth, the foe
Shall put the armor of his strength to scorn,
And from the walls of Bethshan shall his bones
Proclaim the chosen king of Israel
Forsaken of his people and his God.

Michal. O father, I adjure thee, speak no more
Such words of desolation.

Saul. Who art thou,
That I should stay the spirit from within
When it communeth with me of the days

That are to come? Put off thy golden bands
And royal gems and cunning broideries,
If yet the pride of Kish is in thy heart,
For one whom thou despisest shall remove
Them from thee to enjoy thy comeliness
And one thou lovest, thou shalt yet despise,
Though he be lifted up and thou become
In bitter woe the least of concubines,
Until the serving women of thy house
Shall hold thee in derision, for their arms
Shall gather up the harvest of desire
Which thou art sowing now unto the wind.

Michal. Thy speech hath nothing left to pierce my
soul

But curses, yet, my father, not from thee,
But from some evil spirit doth proceed
This woeful condemnation and my heart
Defyeth its intent. O stay thy hand.

[*Saul threateneth Michal.*]

Jonathan. Wilt thou not spare thy daughter?

Saul. Knowest thou

She mocketh that diviner in my breast
Whose sceptre ruleth mine, yet, be it so,
Why should I chasten her before the end?
Thee, rather, should I smite, that thou dost herd
With wild goats of the wilderness, to turn
Thy spirit from its rightful dignities
And set a woman's heart within thy breast.
Wilt thou forget the valor of thy youth,
When, in the sight of Gibeah, thy bow
Did chasten the Philistines that they fled
Unto Beth-aven's idols and, in fear,

Along the bloody way of Aijalon?
Wilt thou yield up thy glory to a lad
Who, by the casting of a single stone,
Would snatch from thee a king's inheritance?
Go to! thou fool, thy feebleness of mind
Is an abomination unto me.

Jonathan. How may I speak, O David, how endure
This cruel madness of a father's heart
Which thou dost see in all its nakedness?
Canst thou forgive him or forget the shame
He portioneth with me and understand
That I may love thee and be loyal still?

David. Take heart, O Jonathan, for I have known
Aforetime of the king's infirmity,
And count his wrathful utterance as vain
As any wind that passeth.

Abner. O my lord,
I pray thee come a little space aside.

Saul. Nay, ask me not, O Abner, and beware
If yet another bid thee, lest his words
Entice to thy destruction for, behold,
The lion shall be humbled in his place
And flee, as doth the jackal, at a sound
In that dark day when vengeance seeketh him,
Saying—where is the terror of his roar
Who when he thirsted drank his fill alone?

Rizpah. O mighty king, if thou canst overthrow
In time of wrath the towers of thy heart,
I, who am but a pillar by the gate
Of its delight, have not so far to fall
If, peradventure, I be now so bold
As to beseech thy going.

Saul.

Wouldst thou

O Rizpah, think me also but a fool,
Even as one who weepeth for the slain
Before a battle. Cover up thy face,
Lest thou behold the vision of mine eyes.
Dost thou not hear me? Nay, I mock thee not,
For I have loved thy countenance full well.
Cover thy face. Seek out those sons of thine
By me begotten. Clasp them to thy breast.
For lo the days shall come when thou shalt sit
By seven leafless trees whose bitter fruit
Shall have no joy for thee, yet shalt thou guard
In anguish of thy soul from all the birds
Of air and every creature of the earth
The feast thou wouldst not, and still thy tears
Shall water it throughout the burning heat
Of harvest time until the latter rain
Cometh to wash the thorny branches bare.

[Saul falleth upon his face upon a couch.]

Rizpah. What saith the king, O Abner? What have I
And my two royal sons to do with this,
His horrible conceit of seven trees,
Whereby his madness maketh reason quake?

Abner. Thou sayest truly. Thou hast naught to fear,
O gentle Rizpah, from unrooted words
Whose harmful bloom, lacking all nourishment
Of understanding, shall be witheréd
Of purpose ere the setting of the sun.

Jonathan. What shall be done to bring within their
course
The raging waters of my father's heart,
And bind the evil spirit of the storm?

Whose hand doth touch the harp so craftily?
Ah, is it yet again this shepherd boy,
This comely face, this thrower of the sling,
Which hath another manner to beguile
The silly women throughout Israel?
Have patience but a little, it were hard
If, by and by, some good Philistine sword
Should not avenge itself in closer strife
Upon this vanquisher of cords and strings.
Yet have I surely heard in other days
This music which provoketh me and thrusts,
Despite its "peace be with thee," to my heart
A treacherous dagger. Tell me, O mine ears,
When have your weary undefended gates
Been open to these companies of sound
Which come in golden raiment and in wreathes
Of flowers to beguile me and betray?
Lo, now the darkness passeth. Now amidst
The long confounding tumult of the years
I hear a kindred music. Can it be
That this mine enemy in Israel's love,
This lusty shepherd, is none other one
Than he who came from little Bethlehem
Before these latter wars to comfort me,
What time my soul was troubled, with his harp,
And won my favor by his cunning hand?
He was a son of Jesse. Verily,
This David is the same. They said of him
The Lord was with him, and, behold, the Lord
Who hath forsaken me is with him still
And bringeth him again before my face

To humble me and make the name of Saul,
The son of Kish, a shame in Israel.
Are men to say that Jacob's prophecy
Beginneth from me, that the sceptre now
Shall not depart from Judah or the hand
Of him who cometh hither from its hills?
O thou familiar spirit of my soul,
Shall I endure so bitter a reproach
And yield the honor of my father's house,
The glory of my wars and of my reign
As first anointed king of Abram's seed;
Shall I the royal heritage remove
From those I have begotten in my pride
And reared in royal ways, to bow the knee,
And teach their knees to bow, before a boy,
A shepherd straying out of Bethlehem,
Who, by the chance which happeneth to fools,
Hath, in a moment, gainéd higher place
Than any proven captain of my host
And waiteth but his time to be a king?
Nay, by the beard of Samuel, who seeks
To terrify my soul with threatenings
And arrogancy of his righteousness,
I shall no more give place to idle fears
Or yet endure before me any soul
Whose dream of power shadoweth my own.
As Phinehas and Hophni, when the flesh
Of sacrifice was seething in the pot,
Did strike their flesh-hooks deep, so shall I take
With my good javelin my portion due
And smite this David even to the wall.

David, thy playing doth disquiet me.

Thus let it cease—

[Saul casteth a javelin twice at David, who escapeth from his presence. Confusion of all before him.]

Abner. O Saul, what doest thou?

My lord, forbear. I pray thee stay thine arm.

Thou art beside thyself. Shall Israel's king,

Sitting amid the women of his house,

Smite down a sojourner who trusteth him,

A youth without a weapon, who hath served

Him mightily and brought his people peace?

Saul. Why dost thou hinder me, thou son of Ner?

Go thou and creep before Philistine foes

And pray them to forgive thee. Kiss their cheeks

Say thou wilt walk with meekness in thy bonds,

Behind their chariots when they return

To hear the shout of Gath and Ashkelon.

Or go thou unto Ramah to the seer

And curse thyself and give an awl to him

That he may bore thine ear unto his door

And be the hard taskmaster as of old.

Do this, but keep thou silence when thy king

Doth smite a serpent which defyeth him,

A hireling of Samuel who serves

His jealous wrath and spieth in my camp

And in my courts that he may find a way

To humble me and render yet again

This proud old man a law to Israel.

But stay thee not, O Abner, if thy heart

Is faithful to the kingdom. Rather smite

With thine own spear, this stripling to the earth

Ere he betray the glory of thy throne
And lift himself above us in the land.
Behold my spirit doth discern again
The course of things to be, and he whose arm
Hath smitten down this champion of Gath
To serve his present honor, shall abide
Hereafter in the gates of Gath unhurt
And sit at meat with Achish in the midst
Of all the enemies of Israel,
He and his household. He shall go and come
According to his pleasure. Wilt thou now,
O Abner, check the fury of thy hand?
I see again, and, lo, upon a throne
This crafty shepherd reigneth in the might
Of arrogancy over Abram's seed,
And we are come to naught, and Gibeah,
And all the lofty plain of Benjamin
Is ravished of its glory. Bloody men
Go to and fro, warring among themselves.
And grievous jealousies do, like a plague,
Corrupt the heart of princes. As a flame
The lustful and adulterous desires
Of those who rule in Israel consume
The beauty of the land and shame shall laugh,
Abiding in our palaces secure.
Lift up thy sword, O Abner, at my side,
And thou, my faithless spear, betray no more
The fury of my hate, for, by the Lord,
Thou shalt, in this exalted shepherd's blood,
My crown maintain, and mightily defy
Through life, the hoary prophet's enmity.

Accurséd be his days with all the woes
Which fell on Eli's house. Let every plague
Of wailing Egypt cease not to pursue
This David while he yet escapeth me,
And, if I fail to slay him, then ye spears
Of strong Philistines take the offering
Your vengeance coveteth and make it sure,
For I shall such occasion give your least
That he may be the envy of a king.

PART IV.

PLACE I. A Garden of the Palace at Gibeah. Merab and Adriel enter.

Merab. Here, happily, we are again apart
From spying eyes and mischief gleaning ears
Of idle men.

Adriel. Aye, here may we discourse,
My gentle Merab, of the secret love
Which, like some hidden and divided spring,
Supplyeth both thy heart's deep well and mine
So equally that, if the one should fail,
The other would deny all pleading thirst.

Merab. And then how sweet to think of love's supply
Flowing in silence when we cannot meet,
To know that in the fulness of one joy
A Another joy partaketh?

Adriel. Yet how long
Must this unfailing fountain live withheld
And never rise to overflow the wells
In which the pride of men and Saul's despite
Have parted it, and be as one again
Before the sun as truly as beneath
The treasure hiding earth?

Merab. Be patient yet,
My lover, but a little. Thou dost know
How changeful is the spirit of the king,
And, peradventure, in a single night
Some troubled dream or quaking fear may rend

An open course in which love's stream shall flow
United, that we share our joy with all
And make his barren heart a fertile vale.
Lo, now he cometh at my mother's side.
Depart, I pray thee, love, for though his soul
Hath, since that day of grievous violence
To him who slew Goliath, put away
The outward show of wrath which tempted him,
I know not yet if any be secure
Whom jealousy hath set her mark upon.
Go quickly hence, and I will send for thee
When time doth give assurance of our peace.

[*Adriel escapeth. Saul and Ahinoam enter.*]

Ahinoam. And wherefore, now, wilt thou be troubled
more

Concerning this same David, O my spouse?
Is he not faithful? Hast thou not removed
His presence from thee?

Saul. Yea, as thou dost know,
He tarrieth no longer as the chief
Of all the men of war who here within
The palace guard the person of their king,
But I have set him in a captain's place
Above a thousand of my fighting men.

Ahinoam. Then, since thou canst not see or hear the
youth,
Why dost thou make him chiefest in thy thought?

Saul. I see him not, yet do I ever see,
While now he sojourneth within the gates,
The joy of those who have communed with him.
I do not hear him, yet I ceaselessly

Attend the arrogancy of his praise,
The sounding words which others do bestow
Upon his wisdom and his uprightness
Whichever way he goeth. Verily,
It seemeth that, though I were deaf and blind,
I still should smell the fragrance of his fame,
That all the strong defences of mine house
Were vain to bar his goodness from my peace.

Ahinoam. If he indeed hath wisdom, thou in vain
Mayest seek to put his presence from thy thought,
For neither bolts nor bars nor armed men,
Nor deafness of thine ears, nor blinded eyes,
Nor kingly majesty, nor foolish mirth
And reveling, nor any craftiness,
Shall stay her admonition of thy ways.

Saul. Thou, also, art partaker with the rest
Of David's vain defense, but shall it be
That this young shepherd from Judean hills,
And all the simple flatterers who shout
About his path, are wiser than their king;
That I am to be humbled in the sight
Of Israel by women's wantonness?
If it had come to pass that David's head
Had fallen to the great Philistine's sword,
Then, by that token, Gibeah should shout
That wisdom was conceived but in Gath
And Baal of the heathen was the God
For Levi's priests and every tribe to serve.
Nay, woman, even as I suffered not
Mine enemies without to put to shame
The honor of mine house, so shall I break
The neck of them who seek my hurt within.

Ahinoam. Then take thou heed, O Saul, to turn aside
By gentleness and kingly dignity
The waves of this rejoicing, that they meet
And overthrow no front of angry pride
Which thou hast builded up against their might.
And, furthermore, take heed that there abides
No pledge thou hast not kept, no grievance deep
Within the heart of him thou wouldst subdue.

Saul. How should I understand these words of thine?

Ahinoam. Didst thou not say, as I have heard report,
When all the host was set in Elah's vale,
That he who overcame Goliath's boast
Should have great riches from thee and receive
Thy daughter and the freedom of his house?

Saul. Aye, peradventure, such a thing as this
I may have spoken, and there lacketh not
Of its fulfilment but my daughter's gift
And treasure which I dare not yet bestow,
Which David asketh not and never man
Hath yet required for him. Art thou, then,
In haste to give thy daughter to the arms
Of this rude shepherd?

Ahinoam. Nay, I urge it not,
Save for thy pledge and that it may secure
His power to thee, since thou fearest him.

Saul [aside]. I, truly, thus can best restrain his might,
Or thus pretend, while I devise his fall.
Thou speakest well, my spouse, I cannot wed
Our daughters to the kings around about
Who bow the knee to Baal. Verily,
It were a wise and profitable thing
To bend the growing strength of David's fame

To due obedience in Merab's love.
Aye, it is wisely spoken, and, behold,
In favorable sign of what we would,
Our daughter draweth nigh.

[*Merab entereth.*]

Come hither, child,
I have whereof to hold discourse with thee.
Ahinoam, do thou go on before
And bid my servants seek this David out,
Saying that Saul, the king, hath need of him.

[*Ahinoam goeth out.*]

Thy face is troubled, Merab. Answer me,
What is it that disquieteth thy heart?

Merab. I will not hide it from thee. Unawares
Mine ears have heard these latter words of thine
And, O my father, I am sore distressed.

Saul. Then thou art proud. Thou wouldst not bestow
Thy comeliness and royal dignity
Upon a straying shepherd.

Merab. Thou dost err.
I honor David with as meek a mind
As any handmaiden of Gibeah,
For the high glory of his zealous deeds
And living spirit do abase the pride
Which groweth but as moss upon the stone
Of graven images in vain conceit
Of beauty wrought alone by others' toil.

Saul. Hold thou thy peace. Dost thou bow also down
From royal place to kiss this shepherd's hand?

Merab. How may I, seeing that I love him not.

Saul. I cannot understand thee.

Merab. Wilt thou, then,
Be gracious, O my father, unto me,
And very patient if I tell thee all?

Saul. Speak on. What trouble now doth lie in wait
To spring upon me?

Merab. Keep thy mind in peace.
There is no sorrow here. No unclean thing
Of evil hath its den within my breast.
But know my heart is given to the love
Of Adriel, that officer of thine
Who waiteth in the band of valiant men
To serve thee and thy kingdom faithfully,
And as thou yearnest for the victory
In time of war, so we attend thy grace.

Saul. Attend no more and banish this desire
Since I have other purpose for thy love.
The daughter of a king is not a maid
For any eye or lip which passeth by
To win by ways of cunning gentleness.
She is the high and uttermost reward
Of mighty valor and approved faith,
The surest bond of kingdoms which are set
In jealous opposition, the fair seal
Of peace unto a nation rent apart
By weeds of rash dispute which grow between
The masonry of welfare and of law,
She is the jewel on the sceptre's top
Which giveth power, light and loveliness,
Nor less is she a golden coffer made
To bear increasing treasure to her lord—
Brave sons and goodly, whom recording scribes
Shall praise and say "Their mother guided them."

Merab. Alas, and must I, father, then betray
This longing heart which seemeth only mine
And which I can as little pledge to thee
As can I yonder eagle we behold
Which seeth all the land of Benjamin?
Nay, I can give thee but the empty cage,
This youthful form of flesh which men call fair,
This snare of their presumptuous desire
Which, lacking love within, shall be as cold
As sad in duty and as dumb in mirth
As Jephthah's daughter when she knew his vow.
Wilt thou accept an offering, in tears,
Thus poor and empty?

Saul. Yea, it needs must be,
For this young captain so hath won the heart
Of Israel that, lest mine enemies
Entangle him or pride should lift him up
To do me evil, I have made resolve
To bind him with thy love to serve my will.

Merab. And canst thou not, my father, give to him
My sister Michal?

Saul. Dost thou then forget,
In thy displeasure, what the custom is
Of all our people that the eldest born
Be first in marriage given? Furthermore,
Thy sister is too haughty to forsake
The courts of Gibeah that she may wed
A youth who, in the passing of a moon,
Hath kept his father's sheep on Judah's hills;
Whom, notwithstanding, thou dost magnify
In speech which well becometh one who waits
The coming of her bridegroom. Hear thou, then,

Thy father's words and let no child of Saul
Again defy him while he lives the king.

Merab [aside]. If it must be that daughters of thy
house

Are even as the virgins which were spared
At Jabesh-gilead or caught away
From Shiloh to be ravished by the strong;
That what the men of Benjamin have done
By stealth, the ruler of their choice should grant
To Judah openly, then dost thou judge
As righteously as of my brother's sin.

Saul. What words are these thou mutterest apart?

Merab. I hear, my lord, in sorrow and obey.

[*A Servant entereth.*]

Saul. What wouldst thou?

Servant. If it may please the king,
There stands without a captain of thy host,
The champion of Judah, who attends
Thy bidding.

Saul. Let him, straightway, come to me.

[*The Servant fetcheth David.*]

Brave captain, I salute thee.

David. Let the king
Command his servant as it pleaseth him.

Saul. Draw nigh to me, O David. Do not fear,
My hand is not against thee. Lo behold,
I cast my javelin upon the ground
In token that the evil in my heart
Hath passéd from me, giving place to love.

[*Ahinoam entereth.*]

David [aside]. What meaneth such a greeting from
the lips

Which, but a little hence, were full of hate?
Assuredly he taketh other course
To compass his revenge, or else, indeed,
The Lord hath come in mercy to his soul
To take away the grief of Israel.

Saul. Give ear, O valiant David, I would tell
The purpose of my heart in bidding thee
To stand before me. Thou rememberest
What time thy cunning hand did overcome
The pride of the Philistines, that the king
Did promise goodly things as a reward
To him who slew Goliath. As he said,
So hath he given freedom to the house
Of Jesse and his sons in Bethlehem,
And unto thee appointed mighty place
Amid his captains, and hath made command
That riches be provided for thy good.
A pledge there yet remaineth unfulfilled
Which I the king, whose word abideth sure,
Do still, as in the troubled host, proclaim
Shall bear its perfect fruit and tarry not,
For since the balm of thy great victory
Hath healed the many wounds of Israel,
Thy patience meriteth its full reward.
Therefore, behold, this princess of mine house,
My eldest daughter Merab, beautiful
Of face and true of spirit, she is thine.

David. My lord the king, how may I answer thee
Or take these overflowing blessings all?
Thou knowest little what my life hath been.
As groweth up a thistle on the hills,
So have I sprung from childhood into youth

Beneath the burning heat and winter's frost,
Rude, thorny, set apart 'mid idle weeds
And knowing not the perfume of sweet herbs
Which grow in favored valleys, or the trees,
The crimson pomegranate and the fig,
The olive, cinnamon and almond fair
Which, to the husbandman, give rich reward;
How should I then have any part or lot
With flowers which do raise their lovely cheeks
Amid high walléd gardens of the great
And blush at salutations of the wind?

Saul. Art thou a Nazarite, hast thou a vow,
O youth of Bethlehem, or darest thou
Reject the royal gift I offer thee?

David. Nay, O my lord, how can I thus offend?
But who am I and what hath been my life,
Or what my father's house in Israel,
That I be son-in-law unto the king?

Saul. A strange confusion covereth thy face
Which met Goliath's strength without a fear.
Dost thou esteem it, then, a greater deed
To burst the bonds of thy humility
And take the comely daughter of thy king,
Than to prevail against his chiefest foe?

David. Aye, verily, my lord, for such as I
It is a greater deed, since I am poor,
Save in thy bounty, and the poor man's lot
Doth ever better teach him to contend
With an oppressor than to fitly wear
Such all exceeding favor. Yet I bow,
O gracious king, in all obedience,
If I am worthy of thy royal will.

Saul. I leave thee to consider these my words
With one whose presence may be in itself
A sweet interpretation. Come with me,
Ahinoam, that these converse alone.

[*Saul and Ahinoam go forth.*]

David. O lovely daughter of my gracious king,
I, but a hawk descended from the hills,
Am surely all unworthy of thy thought
Who art the cherished dove of Gibeah,
The altar of her choicest offerings,
The proud inheritor of royal joys.

Merab. Nay, mighty David, count me not so proud
That I should fail to give thee honor due
As in the foremost rank of Israel,
Yet, not the less, believe that, while I yield
To none in praising thee, I may, withal,
Prefer before thee one of little fame
Whom I have found sufficient to myself.

David. Thou lovest then already?

Merab. Even so.

David. The Lord be with thee. As thy heart is bound
So, verily, is mine to other love.

Merab. Then, O thou valiant David, am I free
To say I love thee more for this release,
To hold thee in the sweet companionship
Of friendly counsel, to partake with thee
Of sighing fasts or dainty feasts of hope,
To go with thee the many turning ways
Of thought concerning those we love the best.
And it may be, some joyful day to come,
That I shall meet the maiden who, perchance,
In little Bethlehem hath kept thy heart

From every royal bounty, and shall greet
Her bended forehead with a kiss of peace,
Extol her David to her thankful eyes
And take her as a sister to my arms.

David. Now am I fallen in the very pit
My thought preparéd as a vain defense,
And all my utmost foolishness of heart
Shall be discovered to thee for, behold,
She who hath spread a tumult in my breast
Against my lowly portion for her sake
Is even Michal.

Merab. O humility,
Is this the manner of thy tarrying
To follow in the steps of high desire?
Lo, but a little time, before the king
There stood a shepherd of so meek a mind
That I was scarce accepted at his hand,
And now it doth appear his pleasure sought
To choose a maiden of the house of Saul
As he would choose a lamb amid his flock.

David. Thou shamest me. O, Princess Merab, spare
Thy mocking. In my soberness of mind
I know I am too humble for the grace
Of sonship unto Saul and these my words
Do but betray the madness of desire
Which yoketh not with understanding's toil.
Do thou forgive me in the mercy born
Of friendliness.

Merab. Desire, in its might,
Doth, sometimes, carry reason to its goal.
Be thou a twofold brother unto me,
O valiant David, first in this thy love

For her who later found my way to life,
And then as a partaker of my trust
And inmost thought.

David. Yet tell me who hath set
The fire on thine altar and made free
This guileless tenderness of thine and mine,
A cooling stream betwixt two banks of flame.

Merab. He whom I love is called Adriel
And standeth, as thou knowest, in the court
Before my father, faithful to his will.

David. Aye, I have seen him often with the king.
But, wherefore, gentle Merab, do thine eyes
So overflow with tears?

Merab. I cannot speak.

David. Perchance I may interpret, then, for thee.
If it should happen that thy father's heart
Were hardened, notwithstanding he should know
The love we bore to others, and his will
Should bind us to a cold and weary bed,
What path should lie before us? Is it this
Thy sighing spirit weigheth?

Merab. Even so.
For how may we in time withstand the king,
Or, wedded, feign a love with hearts despoiled,
Or keep the living pleasure pure and just
Of friends while musing of what might have been?

David. O fair and gentle sister of my soul,
If naught prevail and Saul indeed shall bind
Our lives together, and no other love
Come, like the rising of the winter sun,
To crimson all the snows of Lebanon,
Then shall thy purity be undefiled,
The freedom of thy heart be kept secure

As I would guard the curtain roundabout
The tabernacle from Philistine rage,
And if thou, being daughter of my king,
Wouldst make a vow, lo, I shall hold my peace
Before thee and, whate'er it be, the bond
Wherewith thou wouldst bind thy soul shall stand.

Merab. Nay, David, this is vain to think upon.
We, loving not each other, would offend
Our hearts in the similitude of bliss
And be a scorn to those we love indeed.
We, lacking in desire, yet should grieve
For jealousy of these, and, though we sat
Together in companionship of words,
Would, in the depths of spirit, be alone,
Vain soothsayers whose mysteries were fled.

David. Thou speakest as men know not how to speak,
O noble Merab, guided by the cloud
And fire in the desert of thy way—
A woman's perfect knowledge of the heart.
Henceforth, we will abide in watchfulness
To cast aside the royal chains which now
Our truth hath cleft in secret, through the strength
Of courage gathered for desired joys.

[*Michal entereth unseen beyond.*]

Merab. In pledge of this, I grant unto thy lips,
O valiant David, ere we go our way,
A brother's salutation, such reward
As, I can in my gladness freely give
For thy release from Saul my father's will,
And as a perfect token of my trust.

[*David kisseth Merab and they go different ways.*]

Michal. O sorrow of my soul, what have I seen?
Surely no faith abideth in the earth,
None may I trust hereafter. O thou fool
To doubt but now thy mother's true report
And mock, as only madness of the king,
That which is wiser than belief in love.
Aye, it were better evil ways should rule
In Israel and Baal's worshippers
Should vanquish us, since I have here beheld
A sister's twofold treachery of mind
And David's cunning pride which mounteth up
To leave me for an elder sister's gift.
Lo, now shall hyssop mingle with the blood
Of offerings and Marah's waters flow
Unsweetened from the cisterns of my soul.
Now, were I not a sister but a spouse,
Should Merab drink forthwith before the priest
The bitter water of my jealousy
Until her thigh should rot and on her head
The oath of cursing in destruction fall.
Merab, I hate thee. Woe be unto thee
That thou hast here despoiled me of him
Whom I had chosen, aye, whom even yet,
Despite his turning, I do cherish still,
→ For now I know in truth that all my heart
Is given unto David in a love
That will not suffer aught of hinderance.
It was but yesterday I loved him
As doth the branch some blossom newly born
Hanging upon its favor, which might fall
With but a passing grief until there came
Another to the pleasure of its pride;
To-day, since I have tidings that the king

Hath given Merab unto Judah's chief,
I am become the blossom which hath life
And joy and hope of fruitfulness alone
In the strong branch upholding its desire.
I, who in all my haughty spirit once
Did mock the thought of David as a spouse,
I love him unto madness. Wherefore not?
He is no more a shepherd. He hath now
The stature of a chieftain and his ways
Are even as a prince in Israel.
Shall I wed then with one I do not love
And give my child, perchance, in days to come
To one begot of David, being great,
And hear the mighty say the thing is well?
And shall I not the rather, in my faith,
Be willing to defy the doubter's sneer
And hold so great a gladness as mine own?
This will I do if any subtlety
Of daughter's love or chiding can persuade
The will of Saul from what it purposeth,
If any threatening of jealous wrath
Can turn affrighted Merab from the arms
In which I would—in which I shall delight.
Who cometh hither? Is it not again
My sister who with David doth discourse
So fondly, as conspired to destroy
The remnant of my patience? Nay, in truth
Mine anger blindeth me. The twain I see
Are mighty Abner and the concubine,
Fair Rizpah, whom my father favoreth,
Who, doubtless, talk of Saul's infirmity.
In both the king confideth. Even now
Shall my desire turn them to its need

And cast them first in the opposing stream
Of Saul's displeasure for my feet to pass.

[*Abner and Rizpah enter.*]

My greeting, mighty Abner.

Abner. Unto thee,
O comely daughter of my lord the king,
Be all my duty rendered.

Michal. Wouldst thou serve
My pleasure verily, and also thou,
O silent Rizpah, for I know ye both
Have power to prevail in royal ears?

Abner. How may we serve thee? Rather of thy
tongue
Should we, O Michal, ask the grace of Saul
If either one of us had cause to plead.

Michal. Thou speakest well, great captain as thou art,
Yet, notwithstanding, in a cherished cause
Thy speech may serve me better than mine own,
Which should not utter what it would were told.

Abner. Since tongue can utter nothing ill of thee,
My voice shall be as faithful to proclaim
The thing thou wouldst as was Caleb's speech
When he returned from spying out the land,
For thus the bravest best discern the truth.

Michal. O rather, Abner, would I have thy mouth
Talk oftentimes before my father Saul
Of Rachel's grieving when the stubborn will
Of Laban gave to Leah her delight.

Abner. And can it be, fair Michal, that the youth
Who vanquisheth the heathen and the hearts
Of Israel and Judah roundabout,

Hath overpassed the hill-top of thy pride
And won thee also?

Michal. Have I spoken thus?
O Abner, thou art not a whit behind
The company of Caleb, verily.
Then be it as thou wilt, but as thy soul
Is faithful, and, fair Rizpah, as is thine,
So shall ye whisper very tenderly
The secret which I give ye to the king;
Tell him that David once confessed his love,
And let none other hear what I have told
If I have cause to weep.

Abner. As I am true
To Israel, so shall I be to thee.

Michal. And Rizpah, surely to thy woman's heart
I may reveal my love without a fear?

Rizpah. Thou hast no cause to doubt me. Never yet
Hath love asked any duty, any faith,
Or any sacrifice that knew the depth
Of zeal and strong endurance which abides
Within my soul to serve it mightily.

Michal. Thou makest me desire greater need
To prove so brave a spirit. Fare thee well.

[*Michal* goeth out.]

PLACE II. Chief Room of the Palace, Adriel and Phaltiel.
Enter Ishbosheth.

Phaltiel. How sad a day is this, O Ishbosheth,
Which here uniteth us.

Ishbosheth. Aye, if the king,
My father, had not straightly bidden me,
I verily should have fled from Gibeah.
But he is nigh. There seemeth no escape.

Phaltiel. What may we do this shepherd to withstand
And bring to shame, ere his prosperity
Establish his dominion in our gates
And set him over us who hold by right
Nobility in Israel?

Ishbosheth. Alas,
That, in my father's madness, he should thus
Abase the pride of all exalted men
Who stand before him. How may I behold
My sister Merab given to the lust
Of this base fellow and go forth again
Amid my chosen friends of lofty birth?
Surely it passeth reason.

Phaltiel. Give thine ear,
O Ishbosheth, for there remaineth yet,
In this last hour ere the darkness falls,
A path the skill of Adriel may cleave
To save us from confusion. I have known
Since many years of love he cherisheth
For Princess Merab, and he telleth me
That she hath been well pleaséd—

Adriel. Phaltiel,
This was but for thy hearing.

Ishbosheth. Nay, not so,
Mine Adriel, the hiding of thy love
Is now unprofitable to our need.
And, if it be as Phaltiel hath said,
None, saving thou, hast argument to turn
Reproach away from us, and the reward
Should make thy tongue sufficient to provide
A pleading meet to compass all thy bliss.
And, inasmuch as one of troubled mind
Is ever best persuaded to withhold,

So, if thou shouldst only gain delay,
Is this thy cause with Saul made doubly sure.
Behold he cometh, speak and tarry not.

Adriel. How dare I, Ishbosheth?

Ishbosheth. Thou art a fool

And lacking any courage. There remains
No other chance. If now thou dost not speak,
Our pride is brought to shame and presently
Shall Merab unto David be bestowed.

[*Saul entereth.*]

Adriel. My lord the king, in this which thou hast done
Concerning Merab, hast thou quite forgot
The earnest expectation of my heart?

Saul. When wilt thou cease to tell me, *Adriel*,
Of all thy love for Merab? Is there naught
That I may hear of better argument
Upon this day appointed to proclaim
My child's espousal, why I should not make
My promise unto David's valor sure,
And rid me of its burden?

Adriel. Hear, my lord,
If this be so, my uttermost appeal.
Thou knowest me full well these latter years
That I have served thee faithfully in war
And in the proud divisions of the court,
Thou knowest that no shadow of deceit
Hath come between us, no conspiracy
Or strife in Israel or bribe of foes
Hath turned me against thee as my king;
Whereof the dignity and rank I bear
Near to thy person and before the host
Doth testify to all men. Nor alone

Have I the name of power, for my wealth,
Which I have gathered up with prudent hands,
And those possessions which have come to me
By loving portion of Barzillai,
My father the Meholathite whose place
And just repute thou knowest; all I hold
Awaits thy word and favor to sustain
The glory of thy kingdom or, perchance,
If other love succeed to my despair,
May be enticéd to an alien greed,
Doing thee grievous harm, despite my will.
Lo, all my life hath proved my love of thee.
Despise it not, I pray thee, in the hour
When thou canst make it sure. And who is he
For whom thou wouldst turn from me aside,
Is he a prince in Israel, a king
Whose love would be a covenant of strength?
Is he a champion of many wars?
Nay, he is none of these. A moon ago
No man had knowledge of him in the host
Or in the gates of Israel. A youth
Driving his sheep upon Judean hills,
He hastened, witless, to behold the strife,
Apart from many who had served thee long,
And, by the goodly casting of a stone,
Hath overpassed thy faithful soldiers all.
The people shout his praise in wanton song
Dishonoring their chieftains and their king,
Bounty is promiséd beyond his need
In perilous abundance, and thy hand
Would, notwithstanding, humbly cast before
This glutton fed on Israel's conceit
The sweet virginity of thy fair child,

Nurtured, until this hour, for a king,
Yet offered to a shepherd's rude desire,
As I might tell thee, but to be despised.

Saul. Thou drivest me to madness. Say no more.
I do remember, when I promised him
My daughter Merab, that his countenance
Gave not a sign of gladness but, instead,
He sought to make excuse.

Adriel. Aye, surely now
He thinketh, in the arrogance of his pride,
That he shall have the kingdom presently
And would be free from any bond to thee.

Saul. Had this my spear been faithful to my rage
He would have been already free from bond.

Adriel. Then, O my king, will not thy gracious hand
Bestow thy daughter Merab to my trust
And tender keeping ever?

Saul. Be it so.

Adriel. These two are witness of thy royal word,
My lord the king, my father yet to be,
How may I thank thee?

Saul. Do it less in words
Than in thine acts hereafter renderéd.
This hour would I meditate revenge.
How shall I compass it? The time is short.
Shall I feign sudden illness and delay
Espousal, or forbid it and refuse
To see the youth, or yet a bolder thing?
Behold, I am resolvéd what to do.
When all my household gather to attend
Merab's betrothal to this herdsman's lust,
Then shall I go before his high conceit
And, while he waiteth to refuse my gift,

Shall I withhold my bounty and to thee,
Good Adriel, bestow my gentle child.

Phaltiel. Go to, my king, this is a rare device
The cunning of thy thought, assuredly,
Shall compass David's pride and bring him low.

Ishbosheth. Aye, verily, we shall not lack for mirth
To see this humble fellow in his place
Among the sheep again.

Phaltiel. He hath too long
Already fed with lions in our midst.

Saul. The time that is appointed to betroth
The princess is at hand. Lo, I behold
Approaching us the people of mine house
As kine do gather in at eventide.

[*Ahinoam and her Women enter.*]

It seemeth, O Ahinoam, my queen,
That, coming hither thus without delay,
Thou dost repent of nothing in our thought.

Ahinoam. My lord, thou knowest that I count it wise
To keep thy pledge to David. Therefore now
I come, as thou hast bidden, to betroth,
With thee, our daughter Merab unto him.

Saul. Hast thou commanded that a worthy feast
Be spread?

Ahinoam. Aye, all is ready even now,
And many precious gifts await our child.
Behold her coming onward in the midst
Of her companions. Is there one so fair?

[*Merab and her Maidens enter.*]

Yet dost thou mark her face? How pale it is.
Assuredly some grief hath come to pass.

What ill, O Merab, hath befallen thee,
What woe doth now thy countenance betray?

Merab. Ask me not, O my mother, or else prepare
To save me quickly from my father's will.
I honor David but have no love for him,
Since Adriel possesseth all my heart.

Ahinoam. Alas, my daughter, why wilt thou be led
By vain imagination and desire,
When this is for thy welfare and the king's.
Hear thou my counsel with thy father's need
And be thou wise. It is too late to grieve.

[*Michal entereth.*]

Merab. Lo, there is Michal. Bid her come to me.

Ahinoam. Go, woman, bring the Princess Michal here.

[*A Maidservant goeth in vain.*]

Why cometh not thy sister? There apart
She standeth as at strife with all the earth.

[*Rizpah entereth and joineth Michal. David and Jonathan enter also.*]

Behold thy brother now and at his side
Comes goodly David. Look you how he walks
With lofty head as if he were indeed
A prince of Israel, and, after him,
The great and valiant Abner draweth nigh.

[*Enter Abner.*]

Saul. Now all are here assembled who are bid
Unto the gladness of our household feast,
Whereat I, Saul, the king of Israel,
And good Ahinoam, my faithful queen,
Betroth the eldest daughter of our love,

The Princess Merab. Of her excellent
 And gentle virtues, none require praise
 For from her childhood hath she been with you
 To quicken every pure and good report
 And pluck the spreading wings of evil words.
 I, therefore, having knowledge of her worth
 And purposed that she be kept secure
 From any peril which doth magnify
 Sorrows unto a maid of lofty birth,
 From any weary bondage to the base
 And selfish lusts that persecute the heart;
 I do proclaim that I betroth my child,
 My daughter Merab, unto Adriel.

[*Tumult*

Ahinoam. Thou wouldst say to David.

Saul. Nay, I say

To Adriel, the young Meholathite
 Who standeth here a good and faithful son.

[*Great tumult.*

Merab. I bless thee, O my father. Gladness now
 Abideth with me and obedience,
 Since thou hast given me the one I love.

Adriel. I thank thee once again, my gracious king,
 And pledge thee here my heart, my sword, my life.

Michal. Belovéd father, let me also join
 In fond thanksgiving that thy soul hath found
 Rejoicing for my sister in her choice.
 Forgive me Merab now if I have turned
 Away in anger or distrust from thee.
 Be patient but a little. By and by
 I will upon thy bosom tell thee all.

David. My lord the king, I would not be the last
 To give thee thanks—

Saul. Lo, dost thou too rejoice
That I have taken Merab from thine arms?
Some spirit hath possession of ye all
To my confusion, else so great a shame
As this appeareth which I do command,
Should make a lover rend in bitterness
His goodly raiment and in sackcloth flee
Unto the desert from the sight of men;
Yet thou dost come with cheerful countenance
And thank me also.

David. Truly, O my king,
I thank thee, and the gladness of my face
Hath no dissimulation, nor, withal,
Would it dissemble, even to thine eyes,
If this reproach, which thou hast thought upon
To do me harm, did not remove from me
A greater burden than it willed to set
Upon the bended shoulders of my soul.

Saul. What sayest thou, proud fool?

Abner. Forbear with him.
Thou hast a grievous provocation given.

David. My lord, thy servant thinketh not of wrong
To thee, the Lord's anointed. Shouldst thou smite
My cheek and bitter indignation turn
The one unsmitten to a deeper flame,
Yet would I raise no hand to Israel's king.
Nor did I hold in lightness of esteem
The treasure of thy promise unfulfilled.
To honor gentle Merab is a joy
I share with all thy people, but her heart
Was given long ago to Adriel,
As speedily she told me on the day
When we communed together. Furthermore,

If thou wilt pardon arrogance of tongue,
Which yet may not offend the ears of all,
Thy servant, while he doeth reverence,
Unto the Princess Merab, knoweth not
In her regard that longing of the heart
Which man in vain appointeth for his friend,
That crimson fruit of love which groweth wild,
Defying power, wealth, or comeliness
To find its seed or plant it as they will.
Wherefore, as I have neither lover's grace,
Or portion which befitteth Merab's lot,
I thank thee with the joyfulness of all
For this which thou hast done and count my soul
As free as it hath been to hear and serve
The whisper of its loftiest desires
In sweet companionship of kindred minds,
To give unto the honor of thy reign
The strength of all its zeal for Israel,
And, loving this our nation, to extol
Its Guide, Defender and Almighty King.

[*David and Jonathan go to the Queen.*

Adriel [to *Saul*]. Thy blow hath come to naught.

Saul.

Aye, yet again

He doth escape me. 'Twere as if the head
Of this my spear had fallen from its staff
When I had thought to smite him to the earth.

Adriel. Perchance, a better day shall give to thee
Occasion to rebuke him. Said I not
That it was David's pleasure to be free
From Merab's gift, yet surely I had thought
That this reproach would drive him from thy face,
Or make him violent and give thee cause
To bid thy soldiers slay him. As it be,

Though he escape, thou hast maintained thy pride
And, in this hour of my highest hope,
Joy only should prevail. I pray thy leave
To seek her side whom thou hast given me.

Abner. My lord the king, if I may be so bold,
What purpose turned thee from thy intent
To give to David Merab's comeliness?

Saul. For all that I may do I answer not.
Did not the ending prove my judgment wise?

Abner. Forgive me, O my lord, 'twas very wise,
Yet hath thy wisdom not attained all
Which royal eyes might see or words complete.

Saul. What hast thou hidden, Abner, in thy thought?

Abner. Didst thou, perchance, behold fair Michal's
face
When thou wert speaking?

Saul. Nay.

Abner. Or note her cry
Of happiness when Merab was bestowed
To Adriel's instead of David's trust?

Saul. I heard it not. But what doth signify
The language of her countenance or voice?
Stay, thinkest thou that David hath her heart?

Abner. My lord the king, a little time gone by
I held a conversation with thy child
And, even as the heart of Rachel longed
For Jacob, so hath Michal given place
To David, son of Jesse, in desire.

Saul. But dost thou know it of a certainty,
The thing thou sayest, and that David hath
The self-same spirit?

Abner. If I may believe
Thy daughter's lips, the falling of her eyes,

The tumult of her bosom and the blood
Which rose unto her forehead as she spake,
I give thee faithful tidings.

Saul.

It is well.

The favor pleaseth me. What thinkest thou?

Abner. My lord, if but as chiefest of thy host
I spake, I could not better counsel give
To strengthen and establish thee. Thy foes
Are many and are gathered roundabout
The heritage of Israel. Behold,
Upon the north and westward on the plain,
The proud Philistines vanquished, in their rage
Do gather newer strength throughout the gates
Of mighty cities; Gath and Ashkelon,
And Ashdod, Gaza, Ekron—all await
To pour avenging armies in thy vales,
Which only fear of David hindereth.
These on thy front, and, where the sun appears,
The kings of Zobah wait thy languishing.
If thou dost over Jordan cast thine eyes,
Although thy sword hath slaughtered, root and branch,
The proud Amalekites and made secure
Thy royal crown in Ammonitish blood,
There still abides a remnant for thy hate
With watchful Moab, kindred to their tribe
By Lot twofold begotten; and beyond,
Unto the south, awaiteth Esau's seed
In Edom's mountains to proclaim thy fall.
Is there no wisdom, then, in strengthening
Thine arm against them. This thou verily
Shalt compass in possessing David's love,
Since all men know his mightiness in thy wars
And favor with thine armies. Furthermore,

Not only shall all Judah follow him
Into thy better keeping but one saith
That he is come of Moabitish race
And thus may for their peace be surety.
Wherefore, as captain and as counselor,
For reasons manifold I do commend
This David to the glory of thy will.

Saul. Thy reasoning, good uncle, doth suffice
And honoreth the greatness of thy soul,
Since it doth favor him who riseth up
From naught to share thy lofty dignities.
Aye, if man may be trusted, thou art he.

Abner. So keep me in thy heart and let thy faith
Go also unto him, for I perceive
He hath the spirit of obedience
And honor grateful to a soldier's mind.
Such men provoke not envy but in those
Whose soul should serve them rather than command.

Saul. Bid Adriel, I pray thee, come to me.

[*Abner seeketh Adriel.*]

Adriel. What wouldst thou, my king? Have they not
said

That all is now preparéd for the feast
And we await thee?

Saul. Give me first thine ear.
It seemeth that this fellow hath the love
Of Michal. It were well to favor him,
That all his cunning and his troop of friends
Be turned not against us. But attend,
And her desire yet shall serve our need,
For I shall pledge her to him but devise
Such tarrying and trial of his strength
That she shall be a snare in David's path

Until at last Philistine enmity
Shall satisfy our vengeance in his blood.
Say naught to Phaltiel before I speak,
And go thy way and feign thy pleasure well.
David, wilt thou come nigher unto me.
Some knowledge hath been given to mine ear
Concerning thee whereof my joy partakes,
Since it assureth me that Michal's heart
Is thy possession and that she alone,
Of all the earth, hath overcome thy will
And vanquished thy desire. Therefore know
This day shalt thou be yet my son-in-law
As one of twain, for Michal shall be thine.

David. My lord the king, I would not now deny
Thy grace, as heretofore, for lack of love,
Since Michal liveth ever in my heart
And I have gained favor in her sight.
Yet, if thou dost forget my shepherd youth
In this bestowal of her loveliness
And she can put all lordly suitors by,
Still am I poor and cannot give to thee
The portion which befitteth one who takes
Unto himself the daughter of a king.
I have no goodly house or fertile lands
Or revenue which Michal meriteth.

Saul. Again, O David, thou dost make excuse,
Denying all the grace I offer thee,
E'en that which rendereth the promise sure
I made in Elah's vale unto him
Who should the great Philistine overcome.
And, if there lacketh yet unto thy hand
The riches that thou wouldst, verily
The steward of the royal treasure house,

When he hath reckoned up his just accounts,
Shall give sufficient measure for thy needs.
Take heed thy stubbornness consumeth not
The patience of thy king, and therefore now
Let not the thought of dowry trouble thee.
This canst thou well consider in the days
Of honor that do beckon thee to war
And victory and thine abundant spoil.
Therefore, O David, let my word abide.
Michal, my child, come hither. It is said
That David findeth grace before thine eyes,
And he confesseth that he loveth thee.
What wilt thou, O my daughter?

Michal.

Nothing more,

If I am sure indeed of David's love,
Than that consent which showeth on thy face.
Bend down, my gracious father, that I kiss
Thy cheeks in all the perfectness of joy.
Behold, there hangeth loose upon my arm
This precious bracelet of jewels set
In heavy gold, wrought by the patient toil
Of Tyre's workmen with so rare a skill
Thou mightest think the wonder-working hand
Of that great artificer Bezaleel,
The honored of Jehovah, had devised
Its beauty. This a worthy merchant brought
But yesterday. I purchased it in haste,
Large as it is, and now it shall be thine,
For, verily, some prophecy of bliss
Must needs have made it thus desire's choice
To be a token of my grateful heart.
Give me thine arm. There let it surely hold
While life remaineth, vowing thee my love.

Saul. [*Regarding the bracelet on his arm.*]
When David doth beguile thee from my house,
Shall this be token of thy love, indeed,
Or only, Michal, of thy loveliness,
Or of the pride of kingly heritage
Which thou dost render unto me again?
Whatever be the sign, here shall it rest
While any might abideth in mine arm
To guard our royal name in Israel.
And if an evil spirit seek to turn
My face from thee, may it renew within
A government of gentleness and peace.

Ye who are with me, hear the words of Saul.
Behold, this day of gladness in mine house
Hath gotten double portion for its good,
Since Adriel rejoiceth not alone.
He, as ye all have been the witnesses,
Hath gained a royal bond to Merab's love
In this betrothal, which shall be fulfilled
By marriage in the month that is to come.
But, furthermore, I know by mine own ears
That David, whom ye thought upon to-day
As called unto me for Merab's gift,
Hath not the less obtained royal grace
By winning Michal's love unto himself,
And thus he maketh me a way to turn
The sorrow of denial from his thought.
Wherefore, that I may perfectly fulfil
My royal word in Elah to the host,
And render pleasure unto Israel,
It is my royal purpose to betroth
Our lovely Michal to the faithfulness

Of valiant David, and, if all be well,
When Merab shall have wedded Adriel
And all their days of feasting are at end,
Then, at the second fulness of the moon,
Shall David have reward of long delay
And Michal's love rejoice. Thus saith the king.

Phaltiel [*aside to Adriel*]. What meaneth this?

Adriel. I know not, but the wolf
Assuredly doth feed with lions still.

Phaltiel. Now, verily, when heaven prospers thee,
Thou art a scoffer also.

Ishbosheth. Tarry not,
O Phaltiel, with this base brother thrust
Upon me in the madness of the king.
Go forth with me. I cannot suffer him.

Phaltiel. Nay, Ishbosheth, thou wouldst not alike
Forsake the feast and dare the royal will?

Ishbosheth. Thy weakness hath its wisdom. Let the
feast
Detain thy feet, my father's anger mine.

David. O Princess Michal, dost thou love me still?

Michal. Ere I do answer, let me likewise ask
A question thou hast given to my soul,
For one beheld a youth at Merab's side,
Who, when they parted, kissed her tenderly.

David. It was a salutation but of peace
That each had made resolve to steadfastly
Keep other vows, and then, because of thee,
As brother greeteth sister, we rejoiced.

Michal. Now do I love thee. Rather let me say,
Since I could not but love throughout my pain
Of spirit, now I love to tell thee so,

David. Thy father's words were as a goodly wine
Upon the lips, but these so softly told
Are wine which hath united with the blood
And formeth glowing visions of delight ;
Thy words are sweet to me as chosen strings
Upon my harp to which my hand returns
Whatever be my song.

Michal. Then do thou make
My love thy harp and search thy melodies
Within its fond desire for thy bliss.

David. I shall be faithful, even as of old
Elkanah was, when, in the choice of twain,
He gave to Hannah's need his heart's desire
And tenderness of spirit, gleaning in
All longings of her bosom to his own.
Yet what am I and how should I compare
The mother of the prophet in her woes
With thee, in all the brightness of thy grace?
How shall I wear the treasure of thy love,
Or, saddest doubt of all, how shall I count
Upon the passing promise of the king
In seasons of his dark infirmity?

Michal. Be of good courage, thou who art so strong,
And do thine uttermost. Then, if a time
Of tribulation come, my breast shall front
Beside thee thy familiar enemies,
Need, malice, envy or my father's spear,
And, if thou overcomest by thy love
His evil spirit or, by might, his foes,
Then shalt thou be partaker, as by birth,
Of my delights and guard me as a king.

Saul. O wherefore, gentle lovers, tarry thus
In converse which beguileth appetite
Too delicate or arrogant for good
Before its time. Behold, my household waits
And all is ready. Let us to a feast
Which satisfieth with abundant cheer.

PART V.

PLACE I. A Camp. David, Jonathan, a Captain of the Watch and Soldiers.

David. Art thou, to-day, the captain of the watch?

Captain. I am, O valiant David.

David. Have a care

That all the men who guard us roundabout
Be set a goodly distance from the camp
That they may give us warning in the night
Of any peril. Teach them vigilance
As they would hold their lives and honor dear,
For certain of my spies have come to me
With tidings that there hasteth from the plain
A troop of the Philistines hitherward,
I doubt not, with intent to feel the strength
Of Saul's defenses, seeking if there rests
A lofty place which they can hold secure
To do a grievous harm to Benjamin
In all its borders, even as a band
Of wolves which, from their dens amid the hills,
Do prey upon the shepherd's tender flock.

[The Captain and Soldiers go forth.]

Jonathan. What fire can destroy these heathen foes
Which come like thistle seed on every wind
To take an evil root and spread abroad
In all the land Jehovah promised us?
Scarce have we driven them on every side
When they return to cast forth from our tents
The peace which taketh meat with Israel.

David. My brother, if the seed of Abraham
Are worthy of the gift the Lord hath made
And of the faith of Joshua, their hands
Will testify it still in valiant deeds
To make our mighty heritage secure.
Thy father's sword hath gloriously slain
The enemies of Israel, and thine
Hath made a breach among them at his side.
Let me as well do honor to the king
And these Philistines shall not tarry long,
For thou shalt see abiding in my soul
A zeal beyond the glory of a day.

Jonathan. And thereupon, O David, is a thing
Which I would ask of thee in all the truth
We covenanted ever in the host.

David. Ask, Jonathan, and I will answer thee.

Jonathan. A captain of the host amid the troop
That serveth me hath met with certain men
Among my soldiers called by the names
Eliab and Abinadab, and one
As Shammah known, which three do all maintain
They are thy brethren, even Jesse's sons.
And, furthermore, since thou art counted great,
They make excuse that, in thy single strength,
Thou art no more than others, but hast found
Surpassing might and cunningness of hand
And wisdom in thy ways before the king
By virtue of the Lord's anointing oil,
Wherewith the seer of Ramah, Samuel,
Anointed thee when he had sought thee out
And blessed thee above the sons of men.
Is this which they have said a true report?

David. Aye, verily, though perilous to tell.

Jonathan. When did it come to pass?

David. A little time

After the war with the Amalekites
When none were left among them and the spoil
Of cattle was a boast in all our gates.
But, since in part thou knowest of the thing,
I will reveal it all and do thou judge
If it were wise to publish in the land.
Upon a certain day when, with my sheep,
I wandered nigh the path which goeth up
Unto the northward gate of Bethlehem,
Behold an ancient man of woeful face
Who led an heifer thither after him.
I watched him long until he passed the wall.
At length there came a lad who spake to me,
Saying my father Jesse bade me come,
Whereat I hastened upward to the town
And found a throng upon the open place
Of sacrifice and, sitting in the midst,
Beside the altar was the ancient man
And many elders and, before them all,
My father and my brethren. And I heard
That he, whom I perceived was Samuel,
Had looked with favor on Eliab first,
Who hath a lofty stature and a proud
And goodly countenance, and said aloud,
"Surely the Lord's anointed is at hand,"
But suddenly he put Eliab back
With troubled face and bid my brethren all
To pass before him, saying ever thus
As he beheld them, "Neither hath the Lord
Made choice of this" and when he at the last
Looked on me, as I sought my father's side,

He straightway rose and bade me come to him,
And took an horn of oil and, in the sight
Of all my brethren, he anointed me,
Saying I was desired of the Lord,
And left us wondering and went his way.
And it was told me then that aged men,
Who knew the prophet's parting from the king,
Were sorely troubled to behold his face
Lest some calamity should come with him
And they be calléd straightway to withstand
Thy father's sceptre and his enmity.

Jonathan. Why hast thou hidden from me until now
The secret of thy courage and thy zeal?

David. The Lord is witness that I have not ceased
To give His name the glory and the praise
Of all which bringeth favor unto me
Before the eyes of men.

Jonathan. And Samuel?

David. Of him and of his deed I told thee not
Lest thou shouldst count so marvelous a tale
Vainglorious or false and turn away
In sad reproach or silence from my love,
And lest thy father should, with just excuse
Of jealousy, slay all of Jesse's seed,
Or Israel, in foolishness of heart,
Should make my name a cause against the king.

Jonathan. Hast thou suspicion then of what the deed
Of Samuel imputeth to thy lot?

David. I cannot tell thee certainly. I know
That mine anointing needs must signify
Some special grace or power of the Lord,
As since my life hath proven.

Jonathan. Hast thou heard
That Saul was thus preparéd for a crown?

David. Put thou away this poison from my mind
Belovéd prince, for it beguileth not.
Wherefore should I, a shepherd from the hills
Of little Bethlehem and ignorant
Of all beyond its teaching and the scrolls
Of patient Job and Moses, Joshua,
And some that Samuel hath given us,
Wherefore should I desire to be king
In that far time when, by the will of God,
Thy father, His anointed, and thyself
May be removéd from our faithful love?

Jonathan. Thou wouldst, then, be faithful unto Saul
As king of Israel and unto me,
If I should yet receive my father's crown?

David. O Jonathan, belovéd of my heart,
I swear to thee that, in all reverence,
My life shall serve thy father as the king
Anointed of the Lord to lead His hosts
And keep His people in their heritage,
Nor ever shall he find his trust in vain.
To thee, how can I swear a faithfulness
Beyond the bond thou hast. If I am friend
In all the blessing of our covenant,
Then am I subject to thy love and law
Already, and the first sufficeth all.
The crown is thine. Let but thy love remain
And it shall be the only throne I prize.)

Jonathan. Thou, verily, art faithful of an host,
And, that thou mayest now believe my trust,
I likewise will reveal of secret things
Which no man knoweth but my father Saul

And Samuel and him before thy face.
Know then, when I had smitten in the hold
Of Geba the Philistine garrison,
They gathered in revenge a multitude
Of fighting men at Michmash to the fear
Of Israel, and Saul my father made
Burnt offerings and offerings of peace,
While Samuel tarried, in the people's stead.
But when he came thus speak he to the king—
"Thou hast done foolishly, thou hast not kept
The strict commandment of the Lord thy God
Which He commandeth thee, which, hadst thou done,
He would have ever made thy kingdom sure.
But it shall not continue for the Lord
Hath sought a man out after his own heart
And hath commanded him that he may be
A captain of his people Israel,
Because thou hast not kept that which the Lord
Commanded thee." Whereat my father Saul
Began to cherish wrath and in despite
Ruled others harshly, so that when I smote
At Michmash the Philistines utterly
And, after Saul had bidden none to eat,
Tasted a little honey, being faint,
My father would have had me put to death.
And, had not all who heard withstood the king
For love of me, no mercy in his heart,
No tenderness for all my duty past
Would have prevailed to save me from the sword.
The judgment of Jehovah's righteousness
Doth in its terrors hear his children's cry,
But who can trust the madness of a king.
Now David, thou perceivest all my woe.

David. If he would slay thee, wherefore should I
grieve
Over his evil will?

Jonathan. But harken yet
Its further deed, for in a little space
It came to pass that, when the king returned
From smiting Amalek and drove his spoil
Of fatted sheep and oxen out from thence,
That he regarded not the Lord's command
To utterly destroy both man and beast
In all their borders. Wherefore Samuel,
Who had commandment given for the Lord,
Rebuked my father, when they saw me not,
And said to him "Stay thou and I will tell
Thee what the Lord hath said to me this night.
Behold, when thou wast little in thine eyes,
Wast thou not made the head of all the tribes
Of Israel, anointed as their king?
God sent thee on a journey then and said
Go thou for Me and utterly destroy
The sinners, the Amalekites, and fight
Against them until they be all consumed.
Then wherefore didst thou not obey the voice
Of God the Lord, but fly upon the spoil
And do this evil thing before His face?"
And, when my father sought his own defense
And, for the people, spake of sacrifice,
Then Samuel said "Hath God as great delight
In sacrifices or burnt offerings
As in obeying perfectly His word?
Lo, to obey is more than sacrifice,
To harken better than the fat of rams;
Rebellion is as witchcraft in its sin

And stubbornness is as iniquity
And worshipping of idols. Therefore now
Because thou hast rejected this His word,
The Lord rejecteth thee from being king."
Then did my father cry, "Forgive my sin"
And caught the prophet's mantle and it rent,
Whereat he said, "Thus hath the Lord this day
Rent from thee all the land of Israel
And given up the kingdom thou hast ruled
Unto a neighbor better than thou art."
So did my father Saul beseech in vain,
Save that, before the people, Samuel
Went after him unto the sacrifice,
And slew the king of the Amalekites
In bitterness of wrath and went his way.
It seemeth now, from that which thou hast told,
That, after certain days in Ramah spent,
He sought thee out in little Bethlehem.
Wherefore, if other spirit guided him
Than the impatience of his waxing years,
Thou art the chosen servant of the Lord,
Anointed for a time man knoweth not
To reign upon the throne of Israel.

What sayest thou? Have I not trusted thee?

David. And why dost thou declare so sad a thing?

Jonathan. I tell thee, since thou knowest that the
Lord

Is with thee, that thou shouldst also know
The sorrow which abideth with the king,
And, in the greatness of thy heart, forgive
The darkness of his spirit and the wrath
And jealousy which seeketh for thy life,
Leaving the Lord to guide my way and thine.

I speak, moreover, now to prove thy love
And have thee here discover all thy will.

David. My brother, doubt me not. If all the words
That Samuel hath said should come to pass,
It may, by heaven's mercy, yet be long,
And Saul, forgiven, honored in his age,
May die in peace and thou be lifted up
To reign for many years in righteousness
Ere I am called by weeping Israel,
For I am yet a youth and covet naught
Which would abase the king or wound thy love.

Jonathan. Then is thy heart as true as Joshua's,
For, had thy valor been of evil birth,
I should have seen the joyfulness of proud
And arrogant desires in thine eyes.
Assuredly the spirit of the Lord
Is with thee. Even though I loved thee not,
How should I strive with Him who overcame
The mightiness of Pharaoh's enmity,
Or lift my voice unto the King of Kings
To teach Him who shall reign in Israel.

David. O Jonathan, as thou dost love thy friend,
Shut up so deep a secret of thy trust
Within thy bosom and thy heart and mine
Shall build a temple over it to hide
The sepulcher beneath for evermore.
Our souls shall be anointed, not to rule
In all the persecution of a throne
Where care and pride and fear do never cease
To strive for mastery, but unto us
Be given of that pure and holy oil
Which strengtheneth and sanctifieth men
To serve where something higher than their heart

Begetteth zeal and might. Thus shall we live
In friendship's sweetest bond, in loyal faith
To Saul the king and Israel's defense,
And in a fuller glory of the Lord.

Jonathan. Be it as thou hast said, and let us here,
At this the Ebenezer of our faith,
Set up a stone, a second covenant
Of love beyond the dream of evil men.
But, noble David, if thou wouldst serve
Alike thy highest welfare and desire,
I pray thee give me answer yet again,
And, peradventure, it shall come to pass
That, if thou dost regard me, the reward
Shall follow speedily thy deed of grace.
Thou knowest, David, since the joyful feast
When Merab was betrothed to Adriel
And Michal unto thee, that these my lips
Have uttered naught concerning Saul's desire,
For, inasmuch as thou didst seem to bear
A burden on thy spirit, I was fain
To wait a better day for such discourse
As I, thy friend and brother, should partake.

David. I thank thee, Jonathan, that thou hast borne
In patience with me for a little space,
Until my weary soul be purified
From craftiness of courts and arrogance
Of riches and the cruelties of power,
The treachery of pride that pities not,
The simpleness of vain and empty minds,
Or vileness of the youth of baser sort
Who make the night a hell in Gibeah;
These things have I exchanged for the peace
Of sure and faithful duty in the camp

Where I do breathe again the living air
I loved on Judah's hills and take my rest
With joyfulness or look upon the stars
In their degrees throughout the firmament
As men upon the earth who serve or rule,
And wonder which of all the shining host
Should bear my name. Now, therefore, in the day
Of consolation, shall I answer thee
The thing thou wouldst, keeping nothing back.

Jonathan. O David, tell me then if in thy heart
Thou hast an altar still to Michal's love
And keepest steadfast flame.

David. My brother, aye,
Her love is as the Shiloh of my life
And every thought hath now become a priest
To watch and pour the sacramental oil
Upon that altar.

Jonathan. Wherefore then delay,
Since not the less my sister loveth thee
And Saul my father hath the mind to loose
His cherished dove for shelter in thy breast?
Thou shouldst seize the moment of his grace
Ere yet the time appointed passeth by,
Lest enmity thereafter cleave the camp
And put thee to confusion.

David. Lend thine ear.
Wherefore should any man of poor estate
Espouse a maiden who hath what she will
Of all that fertile valleys do conceive
Unto the care of watchful husbandmen,
Of all the choice and cunning handiwork
Of those whom royal favor watereth,
But, out of lips whose truth might yield increase

Of food and precious raiment to the soul,
Hath only flattery's corrupting words?
He would be ever humble in her eyes
And, with a growing use of wealth's delight,
Would be the more her slave instead of lord,
Or else the base oppressor of her days.
If, peradventure, he should yet attain
By his own strength to proud authority,
He would be hedgéd in by blind conceit
Of riches, which do turn the heart away
From equity of mind and gentleness
And mercy, saving that which mocketh love,
And woman's pride would scourge him from his rest
Or scorn him, did the lingering desires
Of open hearted youth like lilies bloom
At times amid the thicket of the world.
Therefore, O Jonathan, although my heart
In its first flight hath risen to the realm
Of eagles by the madness of desire,
Why should the Princess Michal cherish long
A lover from the flocks of Bethlehem,
Or Saul the king forget his jealousy
And hatred in exalting me the more?

Jonathan. Nay, David, I adjure thee, take thy lot
As marvelously guided by the Lord
Whose will directeth all the ways of men,
And put thine armor on to terrify
In all their tents the foes of Israel.
Let grief diminish not thy strength to bear
In thine integrity my father's hate,
Which lurketh yet assuredly within.
Be thou resolvéd wisely to sustain
The power set upon thee, letting not

An arrogance of speech offend the just
Or fools mistake thy meekness. Last of all,
Yet sweetest offering to my desire,
Take thou the royal love thy fame hath won
In valiant hope and guard my sister well
Beyond the darts of trouble and of fear
Wherewith the evil spirit of the king,
When it possesseth him, doth pierce her soul.
And, that the way be not so steep to thee,
I have, thou knowest, by the city wall
A goodly house which seeth not my face
Since I have purchased that wherein I dwell
Nearer the palace. Take the house for thine,
My brother David, as the marriage gift
My love for thee doth hasten to bestow.

David. O Jonathan, how can I take from thee
So liberal an offering, the less
As I am poor and have not wherewithal
To live in such a manner as is meet
To honor Michal.

Jonathan. Hast thou not received
Thy portion of Philistine spoil or wealth
My father promised unto him who slew
The champion Goliath?

David. Nay, my friend,
The king hath promised often to fulfil
His word in Elah, but as oft withheld
The riches which all men believe are mine,
For he mistrusteth me with jealous heart,
And I have kept my peace as, until now,
I have not sorrowed in the greed of gold.

Jonathan. This is a shame I had not thought upon
And stirreth indignation in my breast.

Behold, if I have any grace to plead
Thy cause before my father, he shall mend
With speedy hand the wrong he doeth thee,
And, with these riches and thy portion due
As captain of a thousand, thou shalt gain
A revenue sufficient for thy need.

David. Thou, Jonathan, art truly such a friend
As maketh any thought a needless care,
But, until I am favored of the king,
There yet remaineth ever in the gulf
My pride hath set betwixt me and my joy,
Such dowry as befitteth Michal's love,
And this my lofty station in the host.

[*Enter a Soldier.*]

What wouldst thou?

Soldier. I come to tell my lord
That there are certain servants of the king
Returnéd to the camp from Gibeah
Who, nigh at hand, await discourse with thee.

David. Bid them appear before me.

[*Soldier goeth out.*
Thus attend,

O Jonathan, with little space of days,
The messengers that Saul doth send to me
Who now would know my welfare, now profess
To give me later tidings of the foe,
Whereof I tell them more, and now again
Do make excuse to search throughout the camp
For certain missing men they vainly seek;
Whence I perceive the king mistrusteth me
And sendeth spies to prove my faithfulness.

Jonathan. I pray thee, bear with his infirmity,
Nor yet forget that thou art newly come
To honor in the host and that the kings
Of the Philistines strive for their revenge
By might, or gold, or craft, or beauty's wiles,
Therefore, though he doth lack my faith and love,
Saul doeth, as a soldier, what is well.

David. Aye, thou art just, but to the upright mind
Suspensions are as nettles in the way.
Yet hold, these messengers who come to me
Perchance have other purpose. There is time.
Thrice hath the sun arisen on the camp
Since certain men came down from Gibeah
Amid the caravan which brought a store
Of weapons and provisions for our need.
These held discourse with me and, at the dawn,
They straightway journeyed back unto the king.
It may be that he sendeth speedily
These servants yet again. Give me thine ear,
That I may tell the manner of their speech
And thou shalt judge of whose device it was,
Theirs or thy father's. Thus they spake to me.
"Behold, the king hath great delight in thee
And all his servants love thee. Therefore now
Be son-in-law to Saul." Whereat I said
"Lo, seemeth it a light thing unto you
To be a son-in-law unto the king,
Seeing I am a poor and humble man
And held in light esteem by all the proud
And lordly who do stand about his throne?"

Jonathan. Can nothing move thee, David, art thou
still
Resolvéd with an equal pride to these,

But different in kind, to thrust aside
The joy that waiteth on thee for the lack
Of dowry equal to thy heart's desire?
Wilt thou that the appointed month doth pass
And find thee weighing yet fair Michal's love
With what a foolish custom doth require,
Until the doors are closed upon the feast,
The lights put out, the minstrels' voices hushed,
And only grief awaiteth for a bride
Whom some despised suitor may possess?

David. Nay, O my friend and brother, thou dost
shame

The love I have for Michal and for thee.
I cannot more withstand thy pleading voice.
Let but a way appear unto my heart,
However narrow, so it giveth room
For honor to maintain her dignity
And pass not utterly with empty hand,
And I will walk within it and my soul
Shall give itself the freedom of thy hope.

[*Servants of Saul enter.*]

David. The Lord be with ye, if ye serve the king.

Servant. We bow before thee, noble Jonathan,
Prince of the house of Saul, and unto thee
O valiant David, captain in the host.

David. And wherefore come ye hither, friends,
to-day?

Servant. We come, my lord, further to speak to thee
Concerning thy discourse a while ago,
Which we were fain to tell unto the king
When he inquired of thee.

David. Tarry not
Because the prince remaineth at my side.
If I should lack an ear, he would become
My trusted hearing, if an eye were dimmed,
His love would see to pluck me forth from harm.
Moreover, he hath heard of what ye speak.

Servant. Since it be so, we need no longer hold
The king's command to tell thee secretly,
And now proclaim to thee his gracious words.
He bid us say, "The king desireth not
Of David any dowry, save the proof
That he hath slain an hundred, by his might,
Of these uncircumcised Philistine foes
To be avenged upon them." When thy hand
Hath rendered this, the steward of the king
Shall straightway from the royal treasury
Give unto thee the riches justly won
Before the host in Elah and withheld
A little time to prove thy faithfulness.

David. If this he doeth and doth ask of me
None other dowry, then I cannot stand
Before ye any longer in the breach
To strive against your urging and against
The quick uprising of my joyful heart.
Now, Jonathan, may I indeed become
Thy brother in the sight of all the world.
Say ye, O faithful messengers of Saul,
That it doth please his servant David well
To be a son-in-law unto the king;
The dowry shall be rendered speedily
And of the tale there shall be lacking none.

[*Saul's Messengers depart.*]

[*A few Soldiers enter beyond.*]

Jonathan. Let me embrace thee, David, since at length
A path is found for thee to turn thy face
In honor to thy pleasure and the king's.
Yet, notwithstanding all my joyfulness,
I tremble for thee. Though thy cunning hand
Hath made a sling the servant of thy will
How canst thou turn aside the javelin
Or stay a rain of arrows with thy shield?
What knowledge hast thou of the heavy spear
Or of the flashing argument of swords
When mighty men beat down the blows of youth
In the thick strife of war's extremity?
I pray thee to consider well thy task
Before thou goest down to heathen rage.

David. Fear not, O Jonathan. As thou hast seen
My arm withstand Goliath and prevail,
So shalt thou see the Lord direct my way
Against the lesser foes of Israel,
And all this troop, which cometh up as wolves,
Shall be accounted sheep for sacrifice
Upon the bloody altar of my love.

Ye soldiers who attend me, straightway go
And bid the captains of my companies
To come together that I speak with them.

[*Soldiers go forth.*]

Jonathan. In all the fulness of my love for thee,
Forgive me, David, if my wiser years
And long acquaintance with the craft of war
Do urge their counsel. Since thy spies have found
The number of this bold Philistine troop
And where they lie in waiting, hasten thou
With greater forces, which are at thy hand,

Divided into equal companies,
And go to-night against them unawares.
The moon is almost full, yet setteth soon,
And, pressing onward early in its light,
Thou canst in quietness approach the foe,
Mark out their disposition and await
The darkness to send down thy faithful bands
From divers sides upon them, sparing not
A man to shout in Baal's temples more.

David. Thy craft is well, but warfare such as this
Becometh not the soldier who would gain
A dowry for the daughter of his king.
I shall not go in darkness, but appear
With lesser number, valiant in the light
Of truth-proclaiming day before my foes,
And, by Jehovah's strength, shall vanquish them.
Let me but ask of thee, to prove thy trust,
That thou release my brethren from thy bands
In season for the day that I shall wed,
And, when thou goest back to Gibeah,
Wilt straightway send a royal messenger
To Bethlehem with tidings of my joy,
And that my father Jesse and his house
Be bidden to the marriage and the feast.

[*Captains enter.*]

My faithful captains, I have bidden ye
To know a bloody service I would ask,
As never until now, for my delight.
Think ye there can be found a little band
Of men to follow me in deadly strife
And tremble not until I teach them fear?

1st Captain. Behold us ready, first, to serve thy need.

David. Nay, O my steadfast friends, I cannot choose
But two or three since others must abide
To keep my companies until I come
With those who shall partake my victory.
Draw ye a lot and, of my fighting men,
Appoint three score who cannot be denied
A strife with the Philistine troop below.

2nd Captain. But doth my lord remember that our
spies
Do make report of full three hundred spears
In this same company of heathen foes,
Shall we not, therefore, go with like array?

David. Nay. Such a war would be no valiant thing
To tell in Gibeah. The men I need
Are only those whose souls desire most
The forefront of the battle's bitter rage
With many spears against them. Do ye say
To soldiers who are worthy that the sword
Of David doth reserve unto itself
An hundred, ere its thirst be satisfied.
What resteth to them of the enemy
They may divide thereafter as they will.
And pray them that they be not covetous,
Lest any man have insufficient part
Or portion in the glory of our strife.
Go ye, and tell me when the men are found.

*PLACE II. Street of Gibeah before the Palace. Much people
of the city.*

1st Elder. Behold what multitude is gathered here,
In the full glory of the summer moon,
Before the palace to await the bride

And mighty David, free through victory
To take her hence.

2nd Elder. Aye, it exceedeth far
The number which assembled to acclaim
Fair Merab when she wedded Adriel.

1st Elder. And wherefore, neighbor, should it not be
thus?

Though Merab is esteeméd and her spouse
A worthy captain, seeing that the hearts
Of all the people greatly love the youth
Who, from the sheepfold, winneth to himself
By mighty deeds the daughter of the king?

2nd Elder. Thou speakest well, and though the bride
be young
And hath, perchance, a foolishness of speech,
Her merry heart and all her loveliness
Of countenance do gain her whom she will.

1st Elder. But knowest thou of what the youth hath
done
To give her dowry? Where so many speak,
I search the truth in vain.

2nd Elder. I know it well,
For one of those who fought at David's side
Is of my kindred and, with all the band,
Saving a few who fell before the foe,
Hath entered Gibeah to witness here
The joy of David and partake his praise.
Thus did my kinsman tell me of his deeds
The while he sat at meat with us to-day.
Three score of valiant fighting men were found
Who went with joyfulness in open day
To, at his side, defy Goliath's seed.
These first reviled him, for they were strong,

Three hundred at the least, but when he ran
And smote his sword among them and his men
Were hard behind him, dealing mighty blows,
When, though Philistines pressed him roundabout,
He still prevailed against them, slaying all
Who ventured to withstand him, then a cry
Arose among the heathen in their tongue
That they beware, for David was their foe,
Whereat a mighty fear came over them ;
Yet, ever as they turned about to flee,
The sword of David smote them and, where'er
They tarried to resist him, did he still
Pursue and slay them on the bloody field,
Until their dead were likened unto sheaves
Of grain behind the reaper, while, between,
Were gleanings for the vultures. Men declare
An hundred of the Lord's revilers fell
Before the mighty arm of Judah's pride,
And those about him slew an equal tale.
Then did the voice of David bid them cease
That they might count the dead and unto Saul
Render the proof which he had bidden them.
Whereat a remnant of the heathen fled
To tell their sorrow, that our foes should fear
No less the sword of David than his sling.

1st Elder. Thou makest me forget the weariness
Of standing in the highway. Who can tell
What heritage awaiteth David's years
When glory such as this doth crown his youth.

1st Woman. Tell me, O Rachel, didst thou ever see
A fairer night? The pale and lovely moon
Amid the firmament proceedeth on
Upon the silent mountains up and down,

Like Jephthah's daughter and his only child
Bewailing her virginity; and here
The white walls of the palace softly shine
Beneath the moon as in Siloah's pool
Doth the fair marble of Arabia
Through living waters, while the darkened groves
Of sycamore and myrtle seem to wave,
By sweet instruction of the evening wind,
Their blessings to the bride of Israel.

Maiden. Aye, such an evening doth breathe delight
To those whose tender bosoms cherish love,
And, where an empty throne awaiteth it,
Doth fret the heart with longing.

1st Scribe. Now behold,
They part the hangings of the palace door.
The king is coming.

2nd Scribe. Not alone the king,
But many with him. As the furnace yields
Its molten gold to furrows of the clay,
So doth the palace pour its glory out
Unto the pleasure of the multitude
With flaming torches which dispute the moon.
Assuredly Saul willeth not to do
The people honor. Sullenly he stands
As doth an aged camel of the herd
Amid the market place.

1st Scribe. And o'er his brow
The shining helmet casts a pitying shade.
Lo, Abner joineth him and looketh down
As if a multitude that gathered not
In warlike order were but sad to see
As bullocks all unbroken to the plough
When spring doth urge the sower. After him

There cometh Adriel and his fair spouse,
Who scarce have overpassed the joyful days
And marriage feasts of their own happiness.
And verily, to see their countenance,
One might believe their patience had reward.
Now doth Ahinoam the queen appear,
And, lo, the bride, let others be forgot.

1st Woman. Behold ye, Michal cometh.

2nd Woman. Aye, the bride,

Our lovely princess with her maidens fair
In white apparel all, as one might dream
A garden bed of lilies 'neath the moon.
And, in its brightness, mark the chosen gems
Of Michal's diadem which sparkle forth
About her veiled head as little waves
Upon the silver pathway of a sea.

1st Woman. Behold her raiment wrought with threads
of gold.

A goodly price, assuredly, the king
Hath given to some merchant of the east
For such apparel. Would that yonder veil
Might part its brodered folds, showing her face
In all love's gentleness, a fairer sight
Than jewels and soft garments.

Maiden. Nay, not so,

If thou dost speak of Michal's countenance,
For pride would ever tarry to dispute
The meekness which adorneth perfect love.

2nd Woman. Give ear unto the minstrels of the king.
Their music changeth. First they rendered Saul
The trumpets royal greeting. Then, as those
Who smile and softly speak in slumbering,
Their tabrets, lutes and psalteries combined

Melodious salutation to the bride
Until a need of love my bosom filled
And thine and this young maiden's. Surely now
The quickening of harps to glad desire
And joyful sound of cymbals do prepare
The coming of the bridegroom. Lo above
The instruments, thou hearest now the noise
Of joyful shouting by the multitude
Beyond us. Surely David is at hand.

1st Merchant. Our champion approacheth. Thinkest
thou

The people yet again will magnify
His deeds in boastful song and move the king
To violence?

2nd Merchant. Nay, David hath desired
That they who love him should in nowise stir
The wrath of Saul against him.

1st Merchant. He doth fear,
Perchance, that Saul will yet repent his word
And snatch his daughter from the gates of love
To gladden envy.

2nd Merchant. Some, of David, say
That not alone he bringeth fighting men
To share his glory, but to make secure
This latter cherished promise of the king,
Which, if it fail by royal craftiness,
Will breed a tumult straightway in the host
And peril to the kingdom.

1st Merchant. God defend
The land and all its merchants many days
From any strife which doeth greater harm
Than this betwixt the instruments of Saul
And David's minstrels coming nigh to us.

[*Minstrels enter, followed by David, Jonathan and Soldiers.*]

Phaltiel. And wilt thou suffer this, my lord the king,
Or bless me as thy servant Adriel?
Thou speakest not. I will await my time,
For patience getteth all things, and the end
Of such ill yokéd love shall not be long.

Saul. Abner, is there no manner to withhold
My daughter Michal?

Abner. Nay, thy word must stand.
Thou hast a double dowry from the strife,
And, by the testimony of his men,
The single arm of David hath fulfilled
The tale required by thee in the blood
Of the Philistines. By thy royal word
Unto a captain of approvéd might,
By Michal's love for him, the gratitude
Of Israel, the pleasure of the host,
Which it were perilous for thee to grieve
In now withholding valor's due reward,
Thy promise must be sure. I pray my lord,
The king of Israel, to do his part
With graciousness, if he would still be strong.

[*David and Jonathan draw nigh.*]

Saul. Hail, valiant David. Peace be unto thee.

David. My lord, anointed king of Israel,
May all men serve thee with the faithfulness
Abiding in my heart and in my sword.

Saul. So be it ever, mighty champion,
As thou hast said, in needful days to come.
What thou hast done already doth my grace
Remember and my promise unto thee

Before the host, which I would now fulfil
In giving thee this writing of command
Unto the steward of my treasure house,
That he deliver unto thee a tenth
Of the Philistine spoil and, furthermore,
An equal gift of riches from my hand.

[*Saul giveth David a writing.*

And yet to testify that, by thy deeds
Of warfare, thou hast finished all my task
And given me the dowry I required
In right of thy betrothal—Be it known
To ye who hear and all in Israel,
That Saul, who is of all your land the king,
Doth here bestow a daughter of his house,
The Princess Michal, by her heart's desire,
To David, son of Jesse, as his wife,
To hold in steadfast honor and in love
Worthy her royal favor and defend
From any ill of spirit or of flesh
While life endureth. Michal, thou art free
Henceforth to follow David as thy spouse.
Be of a loyal heart but royal mind
And hold mine honor keeper of thine own.

David. My lord the king, how shall my thankfulness
Be found sufficient for thy gracious will
To raise me from a servant to a son
Before thy throne, exalted in the midst
Of many who are worthier than I
In all except my soul's fidelity.
Be patient with me until I attain
A better knowledge, and the Lord of hosts
Shall witness that my heart forgetteth not
Thy goodness. If I ever may defend

Or comfort thee in weariness of days,
My succor shall be sure, my zeal abound.
Be this my pledge, since all thy royal word
To him who slew the champion of Gath
Is now perfected in fair Michal's gift,
That I bestow on thee my chiefest spoil
The armor of Goliath, save his sword.

*[Michal, having embraced her kindred, is led down
from the porch by David.]*

Come unto me, O Michal, now mine own,
And as thy loveliness beneath the veil
Is hidden deep yet giveth all its folds
The spirit of thy grace, so in my heart
The beauty of thy presence shall abide
Covered secure, yet moving each desire
According to thy pleasure and thy peace.

Michal. O my belovéd, couldst thou see my face
I should not need to tell thee of the joy
Within my bosom which persuadeth me
That I, thy princess, hitherto have been
But poor and go to royal dignities,
Instead of leaving them for thee behind.

Jonathan. Fair sister, I salute thee in thy bliss,
Yea, I do share with thee the steadfast heart
Of David, thinking not thou canst abate
My portion, which is rather magnified,
Since perfect love begetteth not alone
Its increase in the flesh but in the soul
By giving to the seeds of former trust
Abundant fruit and sowing them the more
Along the fields and highways of the earth.
Now, David, in a twofold brotherhood,
The bridegroom's friend succeedeth to the bride

With joyous salutation. Verily,
The Lord hath proven He is with thee still,
For yet again His might hath strengthened thee
In going down to battle and hath turned
My father's hate, like Balak's, from the curse
He thought upon, to blessings manifold.
May these, henceforth, be thine abundantly
While thou dost serve Jehovah and our vows,
And I shall cherish thee in closer bond,
Not to withstand my father in his right,
Or bow alone to proud prosperity,
But to the Lord Who guideth whom He will.
Yet wherefore tarry we upon the way?
All things have been preparéd. Lead the bride
Unto thine house, for there awaiteth thee
And Michal many fair and faithful friends
Of worthy name or noble heritage
Who now rejoice together and unite
To honor love that breaketh down the wall
Of evil pride which separateth men
And giveth unto valor royal grace.

Michal. But are there not with these, my valiant
spouse,
Thy kindred to await us at the door?

David. Nay, Michal, for, although I sent betimes,
Calling them hither to rejoice with me,
My father and my mother made excuse,
Because of all the feebleness of age
And quietness to which their lives are wont
In peaceful Bethlehem, that it were vain
To journey thence, or hope for any rest
Amid the joyfulness of Gibeah,
Or, knowing not the custom of the great,

To stand acceptably before the king;
Therefore, they tarry, in the flesh, behind,
But, in the spirit, hasten unto us,
No longer old but on the wings of joy,
And Jesse giveth us, with hands unseen,
The fulness of his blessing and his prayers
That, might and wealth and honor being won,
We may not know their perils and their woes.

Michal. But shall I not thy brethren here behold?

David. Alas, I need to make excuse for all,
Since three who yet in Bethlehem abide
Do gather in the harvest and the three,
Mine elder brethren who are with the host,
Have put the yokes of envy and of shame
Upon their necks and drag their load apart.

Michal. Then, David, it is fitting that the more
My heart should cleave to thine, since all thy house
Are parted from thy glory for my sake.
Open the empty and forsaken rooms
Unto my love and I will shut without
The sighing winds of grief and occupy
And fill thy soul with all the joy and song
Which blesseth now thy dwelling and mine own.

Jonathan. Why tarry ye? Lead Michal on before.

David. Nay, Jonathan, for thou shalt walk with us.
My heart is wedded scarcely less to thee,
This happy night, than unto Michal's love.

Jonathan. It seemeth rather I must lead the way
That ye may pass in such a multitude.
Where are thy soldiers, David? Surely these
Beset thee like Philistines in their zeal.
Make room, my friends, and let the bridegroom by,
Give passage to the daughter of the king.

1st Youth. Let David speak to us.

2nd Youth. Let David speak,
Hail to the champion of Israel.

Jonathan. Speak thou, to please them, lest we tarry
long.

1st Youth. All glory be to David. Let the praise
Of Israel to David's might be given.

David. Nay, give me not the glory. Praise alone
Jehovah for the wonders He hath wrought
By many mighty men in Israel
Whom He hath chosen to fulfil His word,
And, least of all, thy servant who, to-day,
Doth magnify the Lord's exalted name
And glory in His goodness and His love.
Who shall be likened to the Lord our God
Dwelling on high who humbleth Himself
That He may yet behold the things of earth?
He pitieth the weak, He raiseth up
The humble from the dust and lifteth out
The needy from the dunghill that, henceforth,
He may be set with princes, even with
The princess of His people. Lo, the Lord
Hath chosen thus thy servant in his youth,
Taking him from the sheepfolds to defend
The cause of Judah and of Israel,
While he is faithful, giving him the might
Which cometh by the spirit, for by strength
Without the spirit, no man shall prevail.
The Lord sustaineth not the slothful man,
Nor blesseth He the man of fearful heart,
But unto him who taketh to the strife
Of every duty what the Lord hath lent
Of wisdom and of zeal for righteousness,

To him shall it be given to cast down
His enemies and reap abundantly
Of power and of riches, aye, and more,
The friendship of the wise, the healing trust
Of goodness, the desire of the brave,
The blessing of the poor and the oppressed,
And love exalted, joyful, wonderful.

Jonathan. Now is a way preparéd, and behold,
Already doth a company appear
Of happy maidens to attend the bride,
They light their torches and uplift their song
While psaltery and lute its charm sustain.
The way is free. Go thou, fair sister, on
With David to thy dwelling and to bliss.



BOOK II.

DAVID AND ABIGAIL.

A WRITING IN FIVE PARTS.

FROM 1ST SAMUEL; CH. XXV.

DAVID AND ABIGAIL.

THE PERSONS WHO HOLD DISCOURSE IN THIS WRITING.

DAVID, *a Fugitive from King Saul.*
ABISHAI, *Nephew and Follower of David.*
ABIATHAR, *Priest of David.*
AMASAI, *one of David's Captains.*
AHIMELECH, *a Hittite Captain of David.*
EZER, *Chief of a band of Gadites.*

Soldiers and Messengers of David.

NABAL, *a rich man of Maon.*
DOEG, *an Edomite, Chief Herdsman of Saul.*
ISHBOSHETH, *Saul's fourth son.*
PHALTIEL, *the son-in-law of Saul.*
A STEWARD *of Nabal.*

Shepherds, Shearers, Guests and Servants of Nabal.

ABIGAIL, *The wife of Nabal and afterwards of David.*

Five Handmaidens of Abigail.

The Places where these Persons discourse are the Wilderness of Carmel, the House of Nabal and the borders of Maon.

DAVID AND ABIGAIL.

THE PARTS AND PLACES SET IN ORDER.

PART I.

PLACE.—*The Wilderness of Carmel. Several Shepherds of Nabal, David, Abishai, and other Followers. Messengers sent to Nabal. David and Shepherds discourse.*

PART II.

PLACE.—*The House of Nabal. Nabal, Abigail and Handmaidens. Messengers of Doeg. Nabal and Steward. Messengers of David. A Shepherd and Abigail.*

PART III.

PLACE.—*The Highway nigh unto Maon. Abishai and Soldiers. Then David, Abishai, Amasai, Abiathar, Ezer, Ahimelech and Soldiers. Abigail pleadeth with David.*

PART IV.

PLACE.—*The Banquet Hall of Nabal. Nabal, Ishbosheth, Doeg, Phaltiel and Guests. Nabal and Abigail.*

PART V.

PLACE.—*David's Camp near Maon. David and Abishai. David and Abigail.*





DAVID AND ABIGAIL.

DAVID AND ABIGAIL.

PART I

PLACE.—The Wilderness of Carmel. Several Shepherds.

1st Shepherd. What shearing made thy portion of the flock?

2nd Shepherd. A heavy yield.

1st Shepherd. Nay, surely thou dost boast,
For, by the beam, thy sheep gave something less
Unto the shearers than hath been their wont.

2nd Shepherd. I boast not. I beheld a mighty heap
Of wool beside the weighers gatheréd,
And thou mayest have this good crook if it lack.

1st Shepherd. Then may I humble thee, for in the house
Of Nabal one hath whispered unto me,
Saying "He doeth falsely in his weights
And fashioneth his measures to deceive,
Whereby he robs the shearers of their due
And gaineth wrongfully from them who buy."

2nd Shepherd. Now sayest thou well, perchance, for, on a day,
When I was by the gate of Nabal's house,
I saw a merchant pass who had his mart
In Hebron and had bought our master's wool,
And swore he lacked the measure due to him.

And, having sought it vainly in his wrath,
He smote his heavy staff upon the ground,
And smote the gate and then an ass I led,
Whereat, for fear of him, I ran away.

1st Shepherd. Aye, Nabal is a hard and evil man
And, had I knowledge where to mend my lot
Nor yet forsake my kindred to his wrath,
I soon should turn away from serving him.

2nd Shepherd. And I with thee, but not at every door
May one find favor in these troubled days.
The less, that other masters hereabout
Do watch the paths to Hebron and beyond
And league with Nabal to withhold their aid
From wanderers who fain would toil for them,
Bringing no commendation whence they come.

1st Shepherd. Nor may we dare to venture by the
south
From Carmel's borders, lest some heathen troop
Of Geshurites or Gezrites hunt us down
To dye their spears, or cursed Amalekites
Should hale us into bondage.

2nd Shepherd. Or as well,
Lest these young men who flee the wrath of Saul,
Hiding on yonder mountain, do compel
Our service in a harder measure yet
Than Nabal; until those who serve the king
Shall overthrow them with a mighty hand
And slay us also, being found with them.

1st Shepherd. I likewise fear these outcasts in the
hold,
Marveling that no harm hath come to us
From their extremity. Lo many days
Already have they tarried roundabout

And talked with certain of us in the fields,
Yet have they done no evil, or despoiled
The flocks of Nabal, though the wilderness
Hath little meat for such a company.

2nd Shepherd. How knowest thou that they are nigh
to us?

1st Shepherd. In times of cloud and darkness when
the cloud

Was lifted suddenly, I have beheld
The smoke of secret fires, the feeble smoke
From simple food or scanty sacrifice.
Moreover, markest thou, the vultures seek
Refuge no longer upon Carmel's side
But fly to other mountains; evil beasts
Which once tormented us, have gotten them
Unto their dens, as in their turn dismayed,
Yet are we still delivered from the band.
But wherefore should we fear? Behold, the lot
Of life uniteth us in common woe;
The persecuting wrath of Saul the king
Doth humble them as Nabal useth us,
Is their foe mad and ours not a fool,
And are not both accounted stubborn, proud,
Workers of evil in their mightiness?
In truth, it seemeth there be little choice
Of masters could we make one.

2nd Shepherd. Aye, our lot
Is rather to be taken, for the end
Of this rebellious troop is nigh at hand.
Saul shall destroy them in their hiding place
And leave them to the vultures. Knowest thou
Aught of this David who doth lead the band?

1st Shepherd. Yea, fellow, hast thou never heard of him

Who slew Goliath?

2nd Shepherd. Can he be the same
Who was a mighty captain in the host
And led the nation's wars?

1st Shepherd. No less than he.

2nd Shepherd. And wherefore less in favor—

1st Shepherd. Ask the gods

Who set their fools and madmen over us
And leave to David but the stocks and stones
Of Carmel for an host, while we are made
The governors of sheep—

2nd Shepherd. Hold! harken ye.
These outcasts of the king are surely nigh,
For seest thou our dogs which snuff the air
And bark unto the mountain.

1st Shepherd. Yea, in truth,
They are upon us for, amid the rocks,
I see men coming hither, armed men,
In ways that make it vain for us to flee.
Alas! alas! nor can we save the flock.

2nd Shepherd. What may we do?

1st Shepherd. Naught save to tarry here
And beg their mercy, yielding what they will
Out of the flock, and if they make demand
For many, let us serve them in their caves
Rather than meet our master's chastisement.

2nd Shepherd. So be it, but behold the company
That cometh to us. What a valiant youth
And comely is the one who leadeth it!
He cometh like a ram of two years old
White from the washing of a mountain brook.

1st Shepherd. Yea, this is David's self in very deed
And such a countenance is merciful
Unto the weak. Fear not, I'll speak to him.

[David and several Followers draw nigh.]

O master, spare us. We are at thy feet,
Poor shepherds of the wilderness, who tend
The flocks of one in Maon and have naught
To give thee of ourselves and if we lose
These sheep to thee, our lives are lost to him.
Spare us, O master.

David. Stand ye up again
And fear us not, no hurt shall come to you.
I was a shepherd, even as are ye,
And in my youth I slept upon the hills
Beside my flock or watched until the dawn
To guard from ravening beast or any ill
Of lawless men. When day was come again,
I led my father's sheep with loving care
To green and watered pastures and the ewes
Heavy with young I urged not in the way
But tarried for and when their lambs were born
Unto a stormy world, within my arms
I bore them tenderly unto the fold.

2nd Shepherd. O master, verily, thou seemest now
As kindred of compassion, and behold
The fear I knew is turned into love,
For thou, who, by the common talk of men
Hast known almost the glory of a king,
Forgettest not, in thought to comfort us,
That thou hast been a shepherd.

David. Nay, I joy
To cherish the remembrance of my youth,

Since now I know so desperate a strait
That I have not a kid to follow me,
And am a shepherd, captain, or a king
But in the faithful hearts of these young men,
Friends who through evil consequence of wars,
Of persecutions, hatreds, through the loss,
Sorrow and shame and hardship of pursuit,
Do hold unto me still. Assuredly
Such woes may seem enough, but unto them
Cleaveth another in these latter days,
For we do suffer hunger. It is long
Since we have tasted bread, and bird or beast
Are few and wary upon Carmel's hold.
My men complain and some, in bitterness
Of spirit, would have snatched from yonder flock
Sufficient for our need, but I forbade.
Then others did reproach them and agreed
To guard these many sheep as in the past,
Suffering not the hand of any foe
Or any evil beast to do them hurt,
Or to diminish them, save in our need,
By due petition unto whosoe'er
Possessed all the bleating multitude.
Now, therefore, if our service may receive
Thy master's grace, we have come down to thee
To ask for whatsoever he may give
To succor us in this our sore distress.
Who is thy master?

1st Shepherd. Nabal is he called.

David. Then have they told me rightly. Furthermore
Is not this Nabal one of Caleb's seed
And very rich?

1st Shepherd. It is as thou hast said,
For all the land is his around about,
Whereon three thousand sheep and, at the least,
A thousand goats do gather wealth for him
In wandering witless feast the whole day long,
And lust but for his increase in their own.

David. Assuredly shall one who hath descent
From wise and righteous Caleb and the wealth
We here behold be bountiful of heart
As was Jephunneh's son, and valiant
Of spirit that he honor faithful men
Who strive to faintness with adversity,
And he will help us freely.

1st Shepherd. Nay, my lord,
Not often is the brook upon the plain
Pure as the mountain spring that gave it birth,
And Nabal's soul is foul as yonder stream
Below our men who struggle with the sheep
To wash them for the shearing.

David. Speak thou not
Such evil of the seed of Caleb's house.
Thou hast some enmity that turneth back
Thy heart from duty and obedience.
Behold, I yet do trust him and shall send
Forthwith to Nabal messengers to seek
A bounty which shall lift us from distress.

2nd Shepherd. My lord, thy faith is vain.

David. Dost thou condemn
Thy master also? Verily, the branch
Shall wither sooner if it curse the tree.

2nd Shepherd. Lo, now dost thou reproach us but, in
truth,
Thou, who hast only kept thy father's sheep,

Canst have no knowledge of the bitter lot
Of toiling for a stranger, least of all
For such an one as Nabal whom we serve.
Yet hast thou somewhat servéd Saul the king
Who doth pursue thee hither. When thy faith
Hath its reward in him who scattereth
Thy band before thee, then shall we believe
Our master's righteousness. But send to him,
As thou hast said, and prove thy faith or mine.
This very day do certain of our men,
Some three or four, return to Nabal's house,
Since now the shearing cometh to an end,
To bear the greater portion of the wool
Upon their asses and to make report
Concerning all the measure of the yield.

David. Then shall I send, of these who follow me,
Enough to make a company of ten
Unto thy master. Such as I do choose
Shall better guard the wool from roving men
Who plunder caravans in lonely ways
And can do mightily, should any dare
To treacherously deal with them. And, lo,
Since many in this land of Amalek
Would fain betray me unto Saul the king,
If it should come to pass that these my men
Are compasséd by many foes and slain,
Then shall I count ye hostages and deal
Likewise with ye and all these flocks and herds
That Nabal hath, as he shall deal with them.

1st Shepherd. My lord, the men whom I shall send to
him
Shall serve thy welfare, even these who stand
Beside me and who know thy kindness.

David. And here are their companions. Ye have heard,

Brave friends, what I require of your love.
Ye need no preparation. All our care
Is speedy succor. Therefore now depart
And use soft words to Nabal. Say ye thus
To him that dwelleth in prosperity—
Peace be to thee and peace be to thy house
And peace be ever unto all thou hast.
Now have I heard, abiding nigh thy flock,
That thou hast many shearers of their wool,
And many shepherds also who have held
Some converse with these followers of mine,
But we have hurt them not nor marred their peace,
Nor missed they aught while they in Carmel dwelt;
Ask thy young men and they will show thee this.
Wherefore let them find favor in thine eyes
For these who in a good day go to thee
And give whatever cometh to thy hand,
I pray thee, to my servants in their need
And unto David thankfully thy son;
And may the Lord be with you that my lord
The mighty Nabal may with liberal soul
Give of his flock sufficient for our food.
In faith of this and that we sooner eat,
I and a troop will shortly follow ye
Nigh unto Maon's borders. Go in peace,
And may the Lord be with ye.

2nd Shepherd.

Come with us

Ere we go hence, since ye do hunger sore,
That every man may have a loaf to eat.
The asses, heavy laden with our wool,

Already take the pathway, one by one,
Before their drivers. Soon we follow them.

[2nd Shepherd and the others and David's Men depart.]

1st Shepherd. Wilt thou, O valiant David, share the
food

I have within my sack—the common bread
Of shepherds and a little cake of figs?

'Tis humble, but as thou dost know our lot
And art ahungered, it may serve thy need.

David. I take it gladly of thee, for to-day
I yet have eaten nothing and the bread
A shepherd hath is ever sweet to me,
And his companionship a pleasant wine.

1st Shepherd. Then, mighty captain, since we are
alone,

If thou wilt not esteem it overbold,
I would enquire much concerning thee
Since thou hast fled from Saul, for in the gates
Of Maon and throughout the wilderness
Of Carmel many men since thou art come
Dispute thy cause, marveling what hath brought
Such great discomfort to thee; some are friends
But many cannot know, as now revealed,
The goodness of thy heart. They say of thee
That thou dost trouble Israel, that these,
The young men of thy band are plunderers
And robbers of the hills, the outcast ones
Of Judah, Dan and Benjamin, who flee
From evil deeds and therefore strive so long.

David. Affliction soon begetteth evil name,
O shepherd, and the ear of enemies
Is deaf to truth and mercy. But, behold,
I will make known, since thou respectest me

And since the soul hath comfort in release
Of idle words, all that hath come to pass
Since I was fain to flee before the king
From mine own house, where Michal's faithfulness
Delivered me from death.

1st Shepherd. And hast thou heard
That Saul hath made a gift of this thy wife
To Phaltiel of Gallim?

David. Yea, alas!
O simple shepherd, and it grieved me sore
When it was told me, for I knew thereby
That my young wife was bound by royal will
Unto a bed abhorréd in her love
For me and made a captive unto woe.
Wherefore I wept a space beside the grave
Which Saul had made for that sweet love of youth,
The fair high flower of my heart's desire,
Whose vow was proven in her father's hate;
For after Jonathan had reconciled
Saul to my presence for a little while,
He cast his javelin again to slay,
And, when I sought a refuge in mine house,
His messengers pursued and Michal made
An image in my bed, telling the men
That I was sick, which gave me time to flee
Beyond his rage, let from the window down
By tender hands made mighty in her love.
Ah, Saul hath found a surer javelin
To pierce my heart in this iniquity,
And, though Ahinoam of Jezreel
Hath since been taken unto me to wife
In humble choice to end my loneliness,

I need the love of zealous Michal more
With every sorrow, every fresh despair.

1st Shepherd. But tell me of thy fleeing from the king.

David. Aye, shepherd, though I know not why I show
Unto thee all the troubles of my heart,
Except it be so faint, so weary of days,
So thronged with prisoned woes that it doth seek
Some open balm as of an evening wind
After the desert heat. But now attend
And I will tell thee only thy desire.
First did I flee to Naioth and communed
With Samuel and told what Saul had done.
Then hastened men of Saul to compass me,
But when they saw the prophets of the Lord,
They prophesied and others after them.
Thrice sent the king and when he came, behold,
The king did prophesy to shame them all.
Thence fled I unto Ramah where I talked
With Jonathan of all our growing woes,
Renewing there our covenant of love,
And he devised a sign whereby I knew,
From three sad arrows shot beyond the mark,
That my last hope was captive to despair.
Then went I to Ahimelech the priest
Who in my hunger gave me hallowed bread
And, for a weapon, great Goliath's sword
As from the Lord returned. I thence in fear
Of crafty Doeg, steward unto Saul,
Tarrying there, escaped to heathen gates
And feignéd foolishness to turn the king
Achish, who had a dread of Israel's might,

From harming me. Then out of Gath I fled
To seek Adullam's cave, where came to me
My brethren and my father and his house
Who also fled from Saul's malignity.
And many others sought me in distress,
In debt or discontent—four hundred men,
And I became a captain over them.
Thence led I unto Moab to its king
My father and my mother who were old,
That, being of his kindred, they might rest
Secure from persecution. Leaving them,
With their last blessing, came I back again
Unto the hold and Gad gave strength to me—
He of the prophets, and while Doeg slew
Ahimelech and fourscore of the priests
By reason of the mad wrath of the king
Who falsely thought that with me they conspired,
I gathered courage from the prophet's word
And from the indignation of my soul
To go down unto Keilah which was held
By the Philistines. There I smote them sore
With an exceeding slaughter but, for fear
That Saul would compass me within the gates,
We fled unto the wilderness of Ziph.
Then Jonathan in secret came to me
Into the wood and made new covenant
Of love with me and strengthened me in God.
Thereafter certain Ziphites, seeking Saul,
Thought to betray me and the king pursued
Unto the hills of Maon, where his hosts
Were roundabout to slay us. We had died
But for the coming of Philistine foes.

Thence fled we to Engedi, to a cave
Where Saul, while searching us, went in to sleep
And where I suffered not a hand to harm
The Lord's anointed; wherefore did the king,
When I gave witness of my reverence
And humbleness before him, make reply,
With shame confessing his unrighteousness,
Saying that I should reign in Israel
And asking mercy of me for his house.
Then went he home, even to Gibeah
Where, did aught other spirit rend his soul
Than jealousy, I might not fear him more.
Lo, shepherd, I have led before thine eyes
In weary space the army of my woes.
The Lord who hath appointed unto me
This dreadful host which presseth me before—
An outcast, poor, faint from my miseries—
He only knoweth if I must descend
Into the darkness, or if, with the aid
Of blessings which accompany man's woes
And the anointing Samuel bestowed,
I yet may turn upon them, overthrow,
Put them to flight, and, running through their midst
Attain the mountain of my former joy.

1st Shepherd. Take courage, O my master, this thy
tale

Of sorrow is sufficient to beget
Strength for thy cause in every righteous heart.
Such love betokeneth the love of God
And Samuel's prophecy shall He fulfil.

David. Alas, when shall He send to strengthen me
A greater priest than this Abiathar

This youth who, when they slew Ahimelech
His father, sought my refuge with a woe
Exceeding mine. Can he be comforter?
I want a priest appointed of my heart,
Anointing of the love of Jonathan,
The blessing of my father, the embrace
Of her who bore me—all these joys again.
What tidings hast thou, shepherd, from the land
Of Moab or from sweet Judean hills
Where dwelleth all my love, my hope, my peace?

1st Shepherd. I verily have naught to tell to thee
But what concerneth Nabal's goats and sheep,
For in these troubled days when men dispute
Betwixt Saul's rule or thine, betwixt the praise
Of Baal or the Lord of Israel,
And when the churlishness of Nabal's will
Giveth no peace to any in his house;
The little joy I have is in the life
Apportioned me amid this wilderness
Where none oppreseth us, no alien care
Doth stoop unto our poor and simple lives,
And naught hath hitherto disturbéd rest
Save fear of vultures, evil beasts, or thee.

David. If thou, hereafter, fearest these no more,
Which thus I have in rude companionship,
Than thou dost me and mine, thou shalt do well.
But hast thou yet no tidings of the king,
Where he abideth, what his enmity
Deviseth to my hurt, or if the chance
Of strife with the Philistines may again
Give me a way to honor Israel?

1st Shepherd. Nay, we have been apart from idle
tongues

Since first began the shearing of the flock
And know not who are washed or who are shorn
Among the troubled sons of Abraham.

David. Then canst thou tell me aught of Samuel
And if the king is yet constrained to serve
That fearless messenger of heavenly will?

1st Shepherd. Alas, my lord, if thou indeed hast heard
No tidings of him, then forgive my tongue.
A wayfarer from Hebron sought our fold
A little space ago and, as we talked,
He told us that the land of Israel
Was bowed in lamentation, forasmuch
As one, a mighty prophet of the Lord,
Was gathered to his fathers.

David. What is this?
What sayest thou, O shepherd, speakest thou
Of Samuel the seer?

1st Shepherd. Aye, it was he
And to his house in Ramah, as we heard,
There came a host of wise and mighty men
To make lament for him, save only those
Who had some secret purpose to possess
The grace of Saul who held him in despite.

David. Go seek thy sheep, for I would be alone.

[*The Shepherd goeth forth. David boweth himself.*
Behold, the father of my task is dead,
He who hath set before me all the care
Of living, now hath taken him to rest,
He, whose anointing touch was as a fire
To stir me into warfare with my king,

Is now of cold and all forsaken clay;
The terror-sounding trumpet of the Lord
Lies broken, rusted on the field of strife,
Silent forever; Peace be unto him
Who, yet a child, communéd with his God
And learned the deeper wisdom that foretells
Almighty purposes; Peace be to him
For whom Jehovah made His thunderbolts
To smite a multitude of heathen foes;
Peace be to him the mighty counselor
Of God before the pride of Israel,
Who granted them a king to their rebuke
And yet was merciful; Peace unto him
The bold and righteous judge who fearéd not
The pride of Saul upon an earthly throne
And humbled him when he forgot its gift
And consecration both to God and men.
Now is the beam which holdeth in the midst
The tabernacle, broken in its place
And who shall keep aloft the frame thereof?
Is it indeed my portion to fulfil
By higher wisdom all a kingdom's need
And take the throne by disobedience lost?
Or doth the seer's anointing die with him
In virtue to prepare me for his will,
Leaving the tribes of Israel again
To judges sent of God, that they forsake
The kingdom of presumptuous desire.
My sore calamities do seem alone
A testimony that the Lord doth take
The sceptre to himself, for since I set
My feet to climb the mount of Samuel's hope,
Its flowers all have withered utterly,

Michal, the first proud crown of my desire,
For whom in youth I strove so joyfully,
Is given to a weakling. All my love
For noble Jonathan is as a jar
Of precious ointment broken on the sand,
High places in the kingdom and the host
On which I stood alone have fallen down
As falls a minéd tower, and now the king
Doth hunt me as a partridge unto death.
Why should I longer flee before his face,
Or live to fret his jealousy or provoke
And sunder Israel before its foes?
I ask for naught, I seek not to cast down
The Lord's anointed, but I cannot turn,
If God hath chosen me to chasten Saul,
From what He willeth, what His prophets teach,
Or from the love of those who follow me
With mighty expectation, or the hope
Of all who need defense from heathen foes.
What may I do? Jehovah, strengthen me
If I must be Thy sword and Israel's shield,
Or, if I am but as a broken spear,
Deliver these who love me from my fall.
Yet Thou wilt not forsake me. Put away
A little space the darkness of my woe,
Stop up the flowing fountains of my tears,
Keep hatred from my couch and black despair
Far from my pillow. Hear me, O my God,
Answer Thy servant who hath trusted Thee,
That he may live and die not, that he strive
Until he may behold throughout the land
Truth, faith and peace, and joy for Israel.

PART II.

PLACE.—Nabal's house. A large room, the back part curtained and having long couches upon which are reclining, somewhat apart, Abigail with a sad countenance and Nabal examining some tablets and scrolls.

Nabal. Fy on thee, woman, let us have an end
To this thy groaning. Either is it thus
When I am purposed to admonish thee
Or, if I would caress thee, thou dost weep.
Mock me no longer, lest I use thee ill,
But greet thy pleasures fitly, put away
This meekness, this simplicity of soul,
This foolishness of virtue which betrays
The poor and humble lot from whence I plucked
Thy comeliness and wear within thine eyes
The radiance of beauty, on thy lips
The joyful pride of wealth and on thy breast
The favor of a dutiful desire,
Even as other women who have won
The love of kings, princes or mighty men,
Then shalt thou honor well my dignity
And men shall envy me and say, behold,
Is not the wife of Nabal from the loins
Of some Egyptian lord in ancient days
By some most gracious maid of Israel?
Then, for a task many would beg of me,
Shalt thou have rich reward. But now attend
And I will give thee tidings that should turn
Thy heaviness of spirit into mirth,

If thou hadst but the profitable pride
Of mighty station. Dost thou harken now?
This roll I hold containeth the account
My steward renders me of all my wealth.
Lo, Abigail, thou hast a happy lot
To dwell with one as mighty as thy lord.
Consider what I tell thee. There is none
In Maon or the cities roundabout
Who hath so great a house or, in the land
Of Carmel, such a multitude of sheep,
Asses and goats, a pasture land so wide
And bountiful of wells and flowing streams,
So many bondsmen, such fair concubines
And comely maidens, yet I choose thee out
As first in my desire. Furthermore,
My steward, if he lie not, reckoneth
That these my great possessions have increased
A tenth within the passing of a moon.
Wouldst thou know wherefore? Lo, when last there
came

Philistines after Saul, I set apart
A talent of silver, making loan of it,
A thousand shekels here, an hundred there,
Turning the balance of my neighbors' needs.
Then did I hire certain crafty men
From Hebron, wearing raiment of the host,
To hasten hither as in sore distress,
Crying "The heathen have prevailed with us
And come upon you," whereupon in fear
My neighbors sought to drive away their flocks,
But I prevented them and bid them pay
Their debt in double portion of their sheep

Before they fled, and many, being in haste,
Forsook possessions which I gathered up
And sold in Hebron. Out of that device
A score of shekels grew where one was sown,
And I could well forgive on their return
Part of their debt to make suspicion dumb.
Aye, when I took thee from thy father's house
In Carmel, he might count his bag in vain
Seeking a thousand. Surely not a maid
In Eshtemoa, Maon or in Ziph
Or any greater city of the land
But would desire to be Nabal's wife.
Aye, thou canst boast.

Abigail. Hast thou no riches more?

Nabal. Yea, verily, since even now I wait
For tidings of the shearing of my flock
Amid the wilderness and, if the wool
Hold to the increase which should come from thence,
A goodly sack beside shall burst with gold.

Abigail. Dost thou not fear some harm unto thy
flocks

From that afflicted band by David led?
For since they tarried nigh us and amid
Engedi's rocks, one saith that they have sought
The wilderness of Paran by the mount
Of Carmel and thy pastures.

Nabal. What are these

That for the fear of them my heart should quake?
Behold, when by a chance which cometh not
To many weaklings, Saul in his pursuit
Slept in a cave amid Engedi's hills

Where David and his feeble band were hid,
The fool dared not to slay his enemy,
But cut his skirts and ran without to talk
Vaingloriously and bow down to him,
And Saul was shamed thereat and turned away.
And shall I dread a fellow such as this
Who fleeth yet unto the uttermost
Borders of Canaan? Verily, henceforth
He would not venture down upon the plain
Where any had a staff to keep my sheep,
Or any ram or he goat of the flock
Might run upon him. But a little time
And none shall know him more, and Israel
Shall rest within its tents, serving but Saul.
Then shall the priests, when this their hireling
Is smitten utterly, be made to bow
Before the king and chastened that they vex
The land no longer with their tithes and laws,
Their sabaoth, their blessing or their curse,
Or shout no more to us "thus saith the Lord,"
"Thou shalt" or "thou shalt not" do thus and so,
"Thou shalt" or "thou shalt not," "thus saith the Lord."

Abigail. But thinkest thou not, Nabal, that the youth
Meriteth pity, for the mighty deeds
That he hath hitherto for Israel wrought,
And that he spared not the life of Saul
From magnitude of soul and loyal zeal?
Dost thou believe not that Jehovah's grace
Is with him since lamented Samuel
Anointed him, that we who are the seed
Of faithful Caleb should show kindness

To one who likewise hath a valiant heart
And mighty hand to strive for righteousness?

Nabal. Thou art a fool, yea, after David's sort,
A slave unto the Levites and the priests.
Lo, thinkest thou a hunter who hath been
Beneath a lion's jaws and snatched away
By succor from their doom, who afterwards,
If he doth get the lion in his net,
Shall slay him not?

Abigail. I think he revered
The Lord's anointed. Yea, and for the sake
Of Jonathan and Michal spared the king.

Nabal. Fool, did I say? Nay, thou art even more,
Thou art a wanton, since thou favorest
So boldly to my face this comely youth
Who maketh women simple in the land
Unto the king's dishonor. Get thee hence.
I, peradventure am become too old
For thy desire. Go, thou wanton, hence
And leave unto the lords of Israel
And unto us, its men of mightiness,
The honor of the kingdom, and as well
The judgment due these robbers on its hills.

[*Abigail goeth out. A Servant entereth.*]

Servant. My lord, without the gates are certain men
Who fain would stand before thee.

Nabal. Whence are these?
If they be shearers from the wilderness,
Command them straightway hither.

Servant. Nay, my lord,
The men are not thy shepherds, they are clad
As those amid the host of Saul the king.

Nabal. The host of Saul! Tell them thy master
waits

To greet them all with joyfulness,

[*The Servant goeth out.*

Behold,

O Nabal, now, the measure of thy might.

The king himself sendeth his messengers,

Assuredly to seek some aid of thee.

Nabal, thy treasure groweth, thou art strong.

Saul is a cunning man. He seeketh thee

That thy possessions may provide his wars.

Be wary, Nabal. If it come to pass

That Saul is very urgent in his need

And writeth "brother" or appointeth thee

A mighty captain for Philistine spears

To make into a dunghill presently,

Accept it not; the rather say to him—

My lord the king, I am no man of war,

Name me the chiefest steward of thy house,

Or let me be the royal treasurer,

Or whatsoever else thou keepest back

To give to such as I am for reward.

[*The Servant entereth, followed by several Men.*]

Servant. Behold, O master, these who come to thee.

Nabal. Ye come from Saul, the king?

Messenger.

Nay, O my lord,

But from a friend of Saul.

Nabal.

And who is he?

Messenger. His name is Doeg. Thou dost know of
him,

The chiefest of the herdsmen of the king.

Nabal. Nay, I do not.

Messenger. Hath not the wilderness
About the ancient city of the priests,
The refuge Hebron, heard of Doeg's sword
And groaned and trembled lest the Edomite
Should make it know the royal enmity?

Nabal. If he is called Doeg who did smite
Fourscore and five of that same righteous sort
Who wear within the guard of Hebron's gates
The ephod, slaying all their house with them,
I know of him. He is a valiant man,
And I do pray that he may straightway come
And reap in Hebron those who anger me
With holy accusation.

Messenger. Verily,
If he may do in Hebron as thou wouldst,
We know not, but that he would talk with thee
And cometh here at eventide we know,
As therefore are we sent.

Nabal. What purpose, then,
Hath Doeg that he thus doth honor me?

Messenger. We cannot answer thee, for Doeg's tongue
Communicateth not his purposes
Unto his servants—only his commands.
But we may say to thee that Ishbosheth,
Son of the king, and also Phaltiel,
The son-in-law of Saul by Michal's gift,
Do bear him company and send with him
Their salutations, hoping presently
To see thee, mighty Nabal, face to face.

Nabal. Thou, verily, art a most worthy man,
Most excellent. Here is a purse for thee.
Go forth with thy companions to the court

That ye may wash your feet and, afterwards,
My steward shall provide in measure due
To banish hunger, thirst and weariness.
But I must see him first that I command
The feast to-night. Bid him come in to me.

[*The Messengers and Servants go forth.*]

Nabal. O, Nabal, didst thou hear, "son of the king,"
A royal prince cometh to eat with thee,
And with him Phaltiel, a prince no less
Since he hath wedded Michal. Both of these
Are hastening to greet thee. All the land
Of Carmel shall be subject unto thee
Henceforth, for fear of Saul, and none shall dare
From jealousy or vengeance to disturb
Thy peace or to dispute the thing thou wilt.
Lo, now, O mighty Nabal, thou must haste
To honor these who come to lodge with thee
As it befitteth princes, and spread for them
So great a feast that, even in the courts
Of Saul the king, they shall proclaim abroad
The wonders of thy treasure and thy house,
The all exceeding bounty of thy hand;
So rich a feast that not in Gibeah
Shall any mighty lord its like behold,
Or any in the gates of Ashkelon.
Then, when the things are told which they have seen,
If I desire aught before the king,
Or surety from foes, or my revenge
Upon the priests of Hebron who provoke
My soul within me, I shall but demand
The grace of Saul and offer gifts to him
And all will turn the manner of my will.

Aye, it shall be a feast to make the hearts
Of all the neighbors I shall bid thereto
Sink down from envy into servitude.

[*The Steward entereth.*]

Steward, great tidings have I for thine ear.
Two princes of the royal house of Saul
And Doeg, who is favored of the king,
Do journey hither and this very night
Shall eat and lodge with me. What canst thou do
To set before them honorable feast,
If all I have is ready at thy hand?

Steward. The time is short, my lord, but happily
Their coming chanceth well, for yesterday
A company of hunters to thy gates
Returnéd, heavy laden from the hills.
This goodly spoil had fallen to their bows,
Two fallow deer, an hart, a mountain kid,
A tender roebuck, chamois three or four,
A pygarg—and a harvest from their snares
Of partridges, wild doves and fatted quail;
From these I can provide them savory meats.

Nabal. Thou needest other flesh for hunger's choice,
Flesh from my herd or flock, the best therein.

Steward. Thy cattle, O my master, nigh at hand
Are few and, saving one, are yet too lean
To serve with honor for thee.

Nabal. And the one?

Steward. It is a bullock having neither spot
Nor blemish, fat and young, a gift of thine
Unto thy wife, which she hath bidden me
To guard and nourish for her sacrifice.

Nabal. Let it be slain, my table shall suffice
For altar where no holy fires may waste
Its savor and where lusty priests may feed.

Steward. I can, without the bullock, serve thee well.

Nabal. Slay it, I tell thee, slay and answer not.
Hast thou sufficient dainties?

Steward. Aye, my lord.

Nabal. Then for the wine, magician of the feast,
That fire for the fuel of thy food,
Which, seeing princes are our furnaces,
Should burn within them brightly, flaming mirth.
Go thou unto my cellars, break the seal
Upon the inner door and carefully
Bear from the cool and darkened cave within
A score of jars full of the precious wine
My father's maidens trod with snowy feet
On that rare vintage year that gave me birth.
Take thou but twenty jars, thou hearest me,
I know the tale within, and seal the door,
Thereafter, I shall go to make it sure.
And let no jar be opened until ye serve,
Or I shall slay thee for a sacrifice
In place of this fair bullock of the stall.

Steward. I hear thee, O my master, and obey.

Nabal. Now hasten unto thy task and if the feast
Add nothing to my glory, then beware.
But what are these who come within the court?
God grant me not the princes yet awhile
That I make ready. Nay, my stars are good.
Nabal, go to! thine eyes are growing dim,
These men are but my common hirelings

Who come at length from Carmel. But with them
Are arméd men and strong, yet meanly clad.
I know them not. They are not of the host,
Nor yet are they of heathen countenance.
Doubtless they journey hence to serve the king.
Bid them to enter straightway as ye pass,
These and my shepherds all, I am in haste.

*[Steward goeth forth and there speedily
appeareth certain Shepherds and with them
Abishai and other followers of David.]*

Come nigh, ye slothful shepherds. Lift yourselves.
Ye have done well to tarry not beyond
To-day in fetching me your just account,
Else ye had known a grievous reckoning.
What is the yield of wool? How many sacks
Were filled in equal measure to the top
After the shearing?

Shepherd. It is written here
In order by the chiefest of our band
Who sendeth us; Five hundred, at the least,
Aye, full five hundred sacks reward our toil,
For there was yet a remnant left to dry.

Nabal. *[to Shepherd apart].* Is the wool good?

Shepherd. Aye, it is fine and white.

Nabal Then mix ye it with other wool of mine
The merchants have rejected. At the mouth
Of every sack the best, and I shall gain
The worth of yet two hundred sacks beside.
But who are these young men who come with ye?
I know them not. What say they? Do they seek
The host of Saul, thus arméd?

Shepherd. O my lord,
These men have come with us to speak to thee.
I pray thee hear them graciously and deal
With them according to their kindness
Unto thy servants.

Nabal [to David's Men]. Wherefore are ye come?

Abishai. We seek thee, mighty Nabal, by desire
Of David, son of Jesse, in whose name
We greet thee. Thus he bade us speak for him
In this the day of thy prosperity.
"Peace be to thee and peace be to thy house
And peace be ever unto all thou hast.
Now have I heard amid the wilderness
That thou hast shearers many, and thy sheep
Are as a multitude. Lo, we were nigh
Unto them and thy shepherds roundabout,
Yet did we hurt them not nor was there aught
Missing among them all the time they dwelt
In Carmel. Ask thy servants of my words
And they will show thee. Wherefore, O my lord,
Let the young men whom I have sent to thee
Find favor in thine eyes, for they are come
In a good day of bounty to thy grace.
Give, therefore, in compassion of our distress,
Of whatsoever cometh to thy hand
Unto thy servants and to me, thy son."

Nabal. And who is David whom ye call the seed
Of Jesse? There be many nowadays,
Unfaithful servants who do break away
Each bondsman from his master. Shall I then
Take of my bread, my water and my flesh
That I have killed to give my shearers meat,

And give it unto men I know not of
Or whence they come?

Abishai. Be it as thou hast said,
But, lo, we turn us from before thy face
To go to David in the wilderness
And tell him all thy sayings unto us.

[David's Servants go forth.]

Shepherd. O turn them not away in their distress,
I pray thee, master. They were very kind
And merciful—

Nabal [striking him]. Dog, dost thou plead with me
For robbers?

Shepherd. They will surely do thee hurt.
Have pity on me.

[Nabal striketh him again.]

Nabal. Go thou after them,
Thou scorpion. Starve in the wilderness
With these thy fellows. Nay, abide awhile
Until the feast is ended which, to-night,
The princes of the land shall eat with me,
And when my dogs no longer gnaw the bones,
These shalt thou bear to him who saith "thy son."
But wherefore should I tarry, slave, with thee
When neighbors must be bidden, raiment sought
And all the house be swept and garnishéd
To honor the companions of the king.

[Nabal hasteneth without.]

Shepherd. Ye gods, ye gods, how he hath smitten me!
I know not but the gold knob of his staff
Hath broken something here. I cannot rise.
My curse upon thee, Nabal. If there be
A God above, He shall avenge my woes.

[*Abigail entereth.*]

Abigail. What dost thou lying here? What aileth thee?

Who art thou?

Shepherd. O, my mistress, I am hurt.

Abigail. Who art thou? Who hath hurt thee?

Shepherd. Pardon me.

Abigail. What hast thou done?

Shepherd. My lord hath hurt me sore.

I am a shepherd from the wilderness—

I had no thought to anger him.

Abigail. Have peace

A little space. Nay, seek not to arise.

Shepherd. Yea, I can lift myself. The Lord be praised,
His staff hath broken nothing.

Abigail. Tell me now

With patient words all that hath come to pass.

Shepherd. Hear then, O mistress, even as thou wilt,
The words of truth. Thy servant hath to-day
Come down from Carmel in the company
Of other shepherds who have left the sheep
To bring the wool thereof unto my lord;
And with us journeyed certain messengers
Of one called David who abideth there
Amid the wilderness in fear of Saul,
And needeth food. Wherefore he sent the men
Unto our master who did rail at them.
But these young men were very good to us
And hurt us not, nor missed we anything
While yet conversant with them in the fields;
They were a wall to us both night and day
While we were with them caring for the sheep.
Now therefore know that David and his band

Are desperate and strong and will not brook
The words of Nabal, and consider well
What thou wilt do to turn his wrath away;
For evil is determinéd against
Our master and against his household all,
If he refuse the meat to succor them.
This I would fain have told him for thy sake,
But he is such a son of Belial
One cannot speak to him.

Abigail. If he hath done
As thou hast said, thy words are true indeed,
Unto the very last thou utterest.
Where is thy master?

Shepherd. He hath hastened hence
That he prepare to-night a royal feast
For certain mighty men whom he attends—
Which journey hither, even as we talk.

Abigail. But where awaiteth David and his band?
What dost thou know about them?

Shepherd. Verily,
I fear he hath not tarried in his need
Amid the wilderness, but followeth,
He and his troop, after his messengers,
Mistrusting not but that my lord were kind;
Therefore he should not fail to meet with them
Upon the way, and, learning Nabal's scorn,
May fall upon us all this very night
Leaving no soul alive.

Abigail. God pity us.
What can I do? The time is short indeed
To check the mighty torrent of his wrath
Which Nabal's words have loosened. Gracious Lord
Of Israel, do Thou give strength to me

And wisdom to deliver us from woe.
One course appeareth, yea, there is but one.
Behold, I am resolvéd what to do,
Even to meet this David in the way
And take him food and beg him to withhold
Destruction from us. Go thou secretly
Unto the steward when he is apart
From Nabal. Thou canst trust him. Bid him read
This tablet that he fail not to provide
Unto thy hand what I shall write thereon. [dressed,
[*Writeth.*] Two hundred loaves, five sheep already
Five measures, at the least, of parchéd corn,
Of raisins quite an hundred clusters ask,
Two hundred cakes of figs, and, furthermore,
Two heavy skins of wine. With these secured
More readily from all the feast requires,
Go thou unto the stables, choosing out
The asses we shall need to bear the food
And make them ready, and the ass I ride
Make ready also. Then abide awhile
Until these men of Saul have come to us,
And it shall be when Nabal greeteth them
And all his thought is turnéd to display
His riches to them, straightway do thou lade
Thy beasts with this provision and go forth,
Thou and the faithful servants thou shalt choose,
Taking the way to Carmel; and behold,
If, peradventure, any ask of thee
Wherefore thou takest hence such store of food,
Say ye are of the shepherds. Go before
And, when I shall have tarried until none
May have suspicion of the thing I do,
Doubt not that I shall hasten after ye.

PART III.

PLACE.—The Highway nigh unto Maon. Two of David's Messengers.

1st Messenger. This is the way we came, assuredly,
With Nabal's shepherds ere the sun was high
To give their lord the greeting David sent.
Yea, here we ran with hope, and here we trod
A little after, turned back again
By Nabal's scorn, weary and hungering,
To tell his words to David. Happily
Our mighty captain followed after us,
He and his band to sooner joy in food
And, learning Nabal's words, doth now prepare
To heal our humbled spirits with revenge.

2nd Messenger. This surely is the way.

1st Messenger.

Aye, verily,

And we are in the cover of the hill
Which hides the house of Nabal set beyond.
Here let us wait, unseen of any man,
'Til David overtake us and his troop,
That we may know the thing he purposeth
And guide to its fulfillment.

2nd Messenger. Lo, they come,
Already David hasteneth before.

1st Messenger. Are all our band with him?

2nd Messenger. Nay, when we came
Upon them, I inquired of the thing,
And one said unto me, "Two hundred men

Tarry upon the hold to guard our wives
And keep the stuff from robbers, but ye see
Four hundred here," and, peradventure, now,
Though he refuséd ten of ye, for us
Nabal may be persuaded to bestow
A little food.

1st Messenger. Will such a band suffice,
Wasted in strength by scantiness of meat,
Against his household and the city's aid,
To chasten Nabal?

2nd Messenger. Yea, for though his house
Hath bolts and bars and walls around about,
And servants many, these despise their lord
And Maon's people cannot succor him—
If so they would—before our swords to-night
Shall make an empty place where Nabal dwells.
Moreover, heard'st thou not, as we came forth
This morning, hungering from Nabal's scorn,
His steward crying out that all attend
Forthwith to spread a mighty feast for him.
If this be true, they will forget defense
And we shall eat our fill amid the dead
As guests unbidden but with greater proof
Of its deserving. Lo, our captain comes,
Our valiant David.

[*David entereth.*]

David. Are ye in the way?

1st Messenger. We have no doubt thereof.

David. And are we nigh?

1st Messenger. My lord, when we have compasséd
the hill,

Thou shalt behold upon the further side
The house of him thou seekest.

David.

It is well,

The day is nearly spent, but we have gained
This hill of vantage able yet to smite,
And soon our vengeance shall be satisfied.
Here let us tarry but a little space
To know that we are all in readiness,
And arméd not alone with these good swords
But with the torches of my rage aflame,
Then, as a vulture of the wilderness
Seizeth a serpent, shall our might descend
On Nabal and his household. Do ye fall
On every male and slay him, sparing not
Of young or old, save only for my hand
The fool himself. Have I not said to ye—

[*Abishai, Abiathar and Soldiers hasten up.*

Surely in vain have I protected all
This fellow hath amid the wilderness,
So that of all that hath pertained to him
Nothing was missed, and he requited me
Evil for good. Come hither unto me,
Abiathar, thou priest before the Lord,
And hear the vow His servant maketh thee.
By the white hairs of good Ahimelech,
Thy father slain, who gave me hallowed bread
When I was hungry, by this mighty sword
Goliath bore which from the ephod's folds
Thy father rendered to me sanctified,
By Samuel's grave I may not weep upon
In gratitude for all he would have given,
By Jonathan, whose heart would fain bestow
A kingdom's heritage to prove his love,

By Jesse and the womb which gave me life
In little Bethlehem—but shall I thus
Disturb the hallowed vestments of the dead
Or shame the living sheltered in my heart?
Nay, these are all too holy to defile
With aught concerning Nabal. Let me vow
Rather by all I hate throughout my soul,
By Doeg's vile deceitfulness and base
Ungodly, lying tongue and bloody hand,
By Phaltiel, that weakling of the court
Whose wealth hath ravished Michal from my bed;
That, when I fall on Nabal in his scorn
And mightiness of pride, this sword I bear
Which knew Goliath's boast and cleft in twain
The throat that made it, shall with swifter rage
Remove this proud reviler from the earth;
And all the good I rendered Nabal's house
And his possessions in the wilderness,
So and more also do the Lord my God
Unto my enemies if now I leave
Aught that he hath until the morning light
Or any male of all his house alive.

Abiathar. I hear thy vow, O David, but beware,
Lest it be more begotten of thy wrath
Than of thy righteousness. Unto the Lord
Belongeth vengeance. If it pleaseth Him
At times to smite the heathen utterly
That we, His chosen people, may possess
This land which He hath promised unto us
And cleanse it of its great iniquities,
Proclaiming to the peoples of the earth
Around about, one God of truth and might,
We can but bow and tremble and obey;

His wisdom knoweth best. Not unto us
The sword is given save to do His will.
Saul sinnéd in his disobedience
Alike when merciful to Amalek
And when he slew the priests before the Lord,
And thou hast made a vow to shed the blood
Of many innocent for one alone
Who justifieth hatred in thy soul.
Take back thy vow, I pray thee.

David. It is made

And if the Lord beholdeth wrong therein,
He will prevent me. I am in His hands.
But until He restraineth this my rage
Against whatever giveth Nabal might
Or joy or peace, behold, my sword shall slay.
How many have we here in readiness?
O Amasai, are thy men prepared?

Amasai. Yea, David, all who have come unto thee
From Benjamin and Judah whom I lead,
Await thy bidding, those whom Saul hath wronged
Amid his tribe who hold their honor dear,
And these who love thee, lion of their land,
Thine and upon thy side unto the end.

David. Their love shall be remembered. Who are
here,
Abishai, of thy hundred faithful men?

Abishai. They all do tarry nigh us with their swords
Unsheathéd for thy service.

David. Hast thou seen,
O nephew true, amid our company
Ezer the Gadite and his little band?

Ezer. Behold us, David, Obediah here,
Eliab and Mishmannah at my side,

And Jeremiah, Attai, Eliel,
Johanan, Elzabad, and yet beyond
Young Jeremiah and Machbanai stand,
Eleven all who fear not any strife
To honor thee, the bravest, mightiest,
Whose valiant deeds do ever stir our souls
To higher warfare than thy just command.

David. I yet shall make ye captains every one
Of hundreds in my host, if once again
The Lord be gracious unto me. And now
As thou and they, for very love of me,
Didst leave all kindred in the land of Gad
And, in the first month when the Jordan burst
With chilly waves his banks, didst overpass
The mighty waters and both east and west
Spread twofold fear to every valley's peace;
So, even so, I call ye to my side
To overcome whatever may defend
The fool who sitteth in his arrogance
At yonder house reviling my distress,
Feigning he knoweth not of David's name,
Accounting me a bondsman who doth flee
As one before his master from the king.
Aye, though we hunger sore, there resteth yet
Strength in our arms sufficient to cast down
That glutton in the fatness of his pride.

Abishai. Thou shalt not bid us twice to follow thee,
Whatever be the strength opposing us
Of Nabal's household.

David. Stay, hath any seen,
Upon the way behind, the company
Ahimelech the Hittite governeth?

Amasai. A little time ago I saw his band,
Assuredly they are not far removed.
Behold he cometh.

Ahimelech. Think not, O my lord,
That I have tarried thus in slothfulness,
But we beheld afar some laborers
Of Nabal's house returning from the fields
Where they had toiled and we turned aside
To take them, that no outcry of our might
Should reach their master, but the men rejoiced
To see the day of his calamity.

David. Ye have done wisely. Are ye ready all?

Many Voices. Aye, all, my lord.

David. Stay, who approacheth us?
I hear the sound of asses in the way.

Ahimelech. We are discovered after all our care.

David. Nay, this is not the sound of fighting men,
But rather they who carry merchandise.
Behold they turn the side of yonder hill
And journey hither.

Abishai. And the asses bear
Abundant food. What joyful chance is this
Which turneth to our need a caravan
Of treasure far exceeding sacks of gold?
Let us despoil them now and eat our fill,
Dreading no more to faint amid the strife
From weariness and hunger.

David. Stay ye yet,
Abishai, for the men flee not away
Although they now behold us. Nay they press
The rather unto us, and there is one
Riding an ass who hasteneth before,
A woman as it seemeth. Sheath your swords,

Companions all, unless they turn in flight.
Yea, verily a woman and her dress
Betokeneth exalted dignity.

Ezer. And wherefore do they fear us not, my lord,
Doth Nabal yield?

David. The thing is very strange.
I wot not. Let us go to meet with them.

*[Abigail coming before, alighteth from her ass, and
boweth herself upon her face to the ground
before David.]*

Abigail. O upon me, my lord, on me alone
Be this iniquity. I pray thee grant
That in thine audience thine handmaid speak
And do thou hear her words. Let not my lord,
I pray thee, give regard unto this man
Of Belial, this Nabal thou dost seek,
For, as his name is, even so is he,
Nabal his name and folly is with him,
But I thine handmaid saw not, when they came
The young men of my lord whom thou didst send.
Now, therefore, O my lord, even as the Lord
Liveth, as thy soul liveth, forasmuch
As God Almighty hath withholden thee
From coming hitherward to shed our blood
And from avenging thee with thine own hand,
Now let thine enemies and they that seek
Evil against thee be as Nabal is,
Whose foolishness sufficeth for his fall.
And let this humble blessing and the gift
Thine handmaiden hath brought unto my lord
Be portioned with the youth who follow thee.
I pray thee in thy mercy to forgive
The trespass of thine handmaid, for the Lord

Will make a sure house to thee certainly,
Because thou fightest His battles and because
Evil hath not been found in all thy days.
Yet is a man uprisen to pursue,
And seek thy soul, but the soul of my lord
Shall ever in the bundle of life be bound
With Israel's Lord, thy God, Who shall cast out
The evil souls of all thine enemies
As stones fly from the middle of a sling,
And it shall come to pass when that the Lord
Shall to my lord have done accordingly
To all the good that He hath spoken of
Concerning thee and hath appointed thee
Ruler of Israel, that this shall be
No grief unto thee nor offense of heart
Either that thou hast shed blood causelessly
Or hath avenged thyself. But when the Lord
Shall have dealt well hereafter with my lord,
Remember then thine handmaid and her words.

David. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
Which sendeth thee this day to meet me here,
And blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou
Which keepeth me to-day from shedding blood
And from avenging me with mine own hand,
For, lo, in very deed, as He the Lord
Of Israel liveth, which hath kept me back
From hurting thee, except for this thy haste
In meeting me, there surely had not been
Left unto Nabal by the morning light
A man of all his household to his call.

Abigail. Since thou hast had compassion, take of these
My servants, for an offering of peace,
Such food as could be gathered up in haste

Before we came to meet thee in the way.
If, peradventure, it awhile suffice
To keep thee and thy men from hungering,
And gain thy grace, thine handmaid will provide
Abundantly hereafter.

David. At thy hand
I take this food as coming from the Lord
To save us in a sore extremity,
Both as a gift from thee and just reward
From Nabal's riches to these faithful men
Who kept his many sheep from any hurt
Amid the wilderness.

*[The food is taken eagerly by David's Men from
the hands of Abigail's Servants.]*

Abigail. Wilt thou not eat,
My lord, assuredly thou needest food?

David. Yea, from thy hands, but any hungering
Is less in this my weak and weary flesh
Than in my heart and were the ample store
Of food thou bringest but for me alone,
Its bounty could not lift and strengthen me
As much as these thy sweet and gracious words
Do satisfy my bosom. Yesterday
My heart was in a desert sore athirst,
Now doth it rest in peace beside a well
Of pure and healing waters with the ripe
And perfect fruit of Eshcol hanging nigh.
Thou art the well and thou the fruitful vine
Which bringeth this delight, thou art the peace
Of evening which banisheth my care.
What may I call thee?

Abigail. I am Abigail,
A Carmelite whom Nabal took to wife.

David. And where, amid the riches of his house
And plenteous reward of each desire,
Didst thou so learn to pity my distress,
To cherish in thy heart the cause I serve?

Abigail. If, David, thou hadst knowledge of my lord
In all his evil deeds and churlishness,
Thy soul would comprehend that in my heart
I should abhor whome'er he favoreth,
And cleave to those despised of his pride,
His gold is brass to me, his wine is gall,
His table, by its wasteful gluttony,
Is as a trough for swine to eat therein,
His bed the inner cell of my despair,
And what I wear before him is no more,
With all its art of needle and of loom,
Than raiment of my servitude. Though wed,
I am too young to know of any wealth
Greater than love, to seek for other gift
Than love bestoweth.

David. If thou hast in truth
No love for Nabal in his mightiness,
Wherefore should I, to whom he giveth naught,
Deserve in thee the chiefest gift he hath,
Self offered now when I am all too poor
To take, and yet too merciful to mar?
I, who though once the right arm of the king,
The pride of Judah and of Israel,
Am now become an outcast, a reproach,
A kinsman unto robbers, an offense
To Saul and to his captains, hunted down
Unto the borders of the wilderness
Where those whom I have saved from heathen spears
Seek to betray me, where ungodly men

Do shake their heads and laugh and say, "Behold,
This is the chosen vessel of the Lord,
The heir of Samuel, the sword of Saul,
The lion of the host; where is his cave
That we may have a little sport with him?"

Abigail. O David, cease. Let not this bitterness
Of spirit overwhelm thee. Thou art poor,
It may be, for a time, and sore distressed,
But thou art yet a captain, aye, a king
To many hearts in Israel. Thy deeds
Are not forgotten of us. Thy defense
From heathen rage of those who serve the Lord
Throughout the length of Canaan roundabout,
The meekness of thy might, thy faithfulness
And mercy unto Saul when in thy hand,
Thy zeal of heart, the glory of thy song;
These things shall be remembered evermore,
And they shall yet exalt thee to thy place
Before the people. Fear not in thine heart
For God shall yet uplift thee to fulfil
His word which faileth not.

David. Thou trustest, then,
Also in Him, the God of Abraham,
Of Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua,
Who reigneth true, eternal and alone?

Abigail. Yea, I believe in Him, for I partake
Beyond the heritage of Caleb's seed
Which Nabal shameth, something of the faith
Which gave to Caleb valiance and hope
And, in his age, a might to overthrow
Sheshai, Ahiman, Talmai—Anak's sons—
The giants of the Anakims—as thou
Didst overthrow, perchance, of their descent,

That proud Goliath who was out of Gath
Where many fled when Joshua prevailed;
Therefore, if now thy courage is a torch
That faileth, I may light it from a heart
Where silently the flame of mightier days
Hath lived for higher use than hope could dream,
Hath lived and leapeth up with newer light,
Rejoicing to sustain thee in the Lord
And in the purest love of Israel.

David. O Abigail, thou art a flame, indeed,
To light the innermost caves of my despair
And lead my soul from thence unto the day
Of faith exalted. When it sank within,
The life of wrath returned at Nabal's scorn
But thou dost make its strength complete in love.
Behold it armed again, and, in the past,
As Othniel did gird himself with might
For Caleb's daughter Achsah whom he loved
And humbled Kirjath-sepher yet again—
That woeful city, for his love's desire;
So do I rise to do whatever thing
God willeth at my hand for Israel,
Restoréd by thy grace. The Lord hath sent
Aforetime Samuel in stern old age
To guide and strengthen me, and, after him,
The prophet Gad, in secrecy of fear,
And then Abiathar amid his woes
And tribulation for his father's death,
But now in loving kindness God prepares
By these thy lips a sweeter prophecy,
And by thine eyes a balm for my distress,
And by thy heart a covenant of joy.
O prophet beautiful, forget me not,

Since I have seen thee, there is none beside
My soul would ask for counsel. Come to me
With each new day and sanctify its light,
With each sad eve and fix thy stars above,
Teach me and I shall hear thee, though thy words
Be whispered in a tempest, make command
And, though the crown of Pharaoh were the spoil,
Lo, I would do thy bidding to the end.

Abigail. Not as thy prophet, David, would I come,
But as thine handmaid. Would I might abide
Henceforth with thee and thine and know no more
The face of Nabal. Think me not too bold,
O David, perfect love discloseth all,
And since I have beheld thee, and perceived
The spirit guiding thee, I do account
Years at thy side in thine adversity
A sweeter lot than an eternal youth
With him my slave and all his treasure mine.

David. O would I thus could take thee, Abigail,
Even to-day, and guard thee on my breast,
Safe from the fool who withereth thy heart
And knoweth little as the altar flame
The fuel from the dove of sacrifice,
But now it may not be. The God we serve
Is not a Baal or an Ashtaroth
Whose groves invite adulterers to praise,
He spareth not the sinner but rewards
With blessing those who hold to righteousness.
Pray we that this our God, the pure and just,
May guard us therefore from the ways of sin,
That love may strengthen us and give us grace
To wait what He ordaineth yet to be.
The bud that youth tears open bloometh not

And love, so brief when violence defies,
Doth gather sweeter fragrance by delay.
Go therefore up in peace unto thine house,
Fair Abigail, and in my countenance
See I have harkenéd unto thy voice
And have accepted for our day of grace
Thy person when the Lord releaseth thee.

PART IV.

FLACE.—The Feast Chamber of Nabal. On couches at a richly garnished table, recline Nabal in the midst, Ishbosheth and Doeg on his right, Phaltiel on his left, and beyond them neighbors of Maon and Ziph. Attendants. Musicians are playing for dancing girls.

Nabal. Now let the music cease and stay your dance,
Ye comely damsels. Ye have earned your price.
Rest your fair limbs and give your bosoms breath
While Nabal speaks. Let all give ear to me.
Ye men of Maon, Carmel and of Ziph,
Though I be rich and mighty in your midst,
I am not vain yet, peradventure, now
I may be proud, for lo, on either hand,
Here Ishbosheth the prince, here Phaltiel,
The sons of Saul, do sit at meat with me.
And I have bidden ye in haste to-day
To know the king discerneth cunningly
And that ye share our feast.

Guests. We give thee thanks
Most mighty Nabal.

Nabal. Furthermore, behold
Doeg, a mighty man who serveth well
The king's necessity, doth honor us.
He goeth not with Abner in the host
But spieth out the secret enemies
Who vex the kingdom, even such as wear
The ephod for defense, who prophesy
And cry against us "Woe be unto thee,

But touch us not for we are of the Lord,"
Such hath he rooted out to shout no more.
Have I well spoken, neighbor?

Guest. As a seer.

Nabal. What thinkest thou? [*To another.*]

Another Guest. Most mightily my lord,

Even as the trumpeters of Joshua
Who made the wall to fall.

Nabal. Thanks to ye both.

Now let the faithful drink to Saul the king.

Guests. Long live the king, long live the son of Kish
Who first in Israel doth wear the crown.

Nabal. And drink ye also unto Ishbosheth,
The prince who selleth not his heritage.

Guests. Long life to Ishbosheth, our king to be.

Nabal. Aye, aye, our king to be. Now fill and drink
To Phaltiel, the son-in-law of Saul.

Guests. Good health to Phaltiel, fair Michal's spouse.

Nabal. And drink ye yet to Doeg every one,
This zealous steward Saul hath sent to us
Who fears no god or man to serve the king.

Guest. Hail to the faithful Doeg. Let his sword
Smite down the Levites which accurse the land,
Confusion to the priests of Israel.

Nabal. Behold, since ye are joined in fellowship,
Ye princes, captains, neighbors, mighty men,
If, peradventure, ye have had your fill
Of dainty meats and every goodly thing
My wealth provideth, harken, for the hour
Hath come for merry words, for wagging tongues,
For deeper cups of wine to overflow
The stony banks the seers have builded up
Against our pleasures, aye, to break them down,

Flooding throughout the valley of desire
Whatever thing our soul delighteth in.

Guest. Hear ye, O princes, how great Nabal speaks.

Nabal. What think'st thou, Doeg, speak I worthily?

Doeg. Thy speech, O Nabal, floweth like the Nile
With weighty matter. I am of thy mind.

The time hath come to put from off our backs

The heavy cloaks of pomp and dignity,

That we may know our nakedness of heart,

Nor shrink and tremble if the Levites cry

Against the lusts in us the gods have made.

Ishbosheth. What sayest thou, O Doeg? These thy
words

Come not from one who waiteth on the Lord

As thou wast wont. Be wary of thy wine.

Doeg. My prince, in shelter of thy mightier place

Thou mockest me, but I have done with prayers

Since I have smitten down Ahimelech.

Until these priests shall learn to serve the king

And do what seemeth worthy in mine eyes,

I am no longer blind, no more their slave.

Do not our living bodies in the flesh

Teach us a fuller measure of delight

Than these dull Levite tongues, which suffer not

The freedom of desire and command

The flesh pots to be broken at our need;

Doth not the heart which willeth to attain

To power, pleasure and riches, run its course

More speedily when it may cast aside

The armor which their law requireth;

And have we not, O Ziphites, mighty men

Of Maon and of Carmel, closer bond

Of fellowship in kindred enmities,

In pleasant lusts and things esteeméd weak,
Than arrogant hypocrites of righteousness
In all their boasted brotherhood of law?
The priests which strive to rule us have become
A plague unto the land of Israel,
Hindering and oppressing more within
Than do the Philistines who threat without
The hills of Judah. Look ye at the king,
Consider well the torment of his days.
Lo, Samuel the seer, when yet alive,
Although he had anointed Saul to reign,
Sought in the arrogancy of his pride
To lead him as one leadeth with an hook,
And when the king, to gain the spoils of war,
Did turn aside from harkening to him,
The prophet would have straightway thrust him out
To set a shepherd lad upon his throne,
This David, who by favor of his sling
Beguiled awhile the foolish of the land
To shout for him, gathering to his side
The Levites as the sheep of Samuel,
Until such mighty men as Nabal here
Gave of their treasure to maintain the pride
Of Israel's throne and drive the brawler hence.
And where hath hid this joy of Bethlehem
Since now his prophet rotteth with the dead?
Lo, is he not amid the wilderness
And numbered with the robbers who abide
Upon the rocks where none pursueth them?
Yet, since this fellow doth provoke the king,
While he endureth, I am come to ye
That we may work together to destroy
This remnant of rebellion from the earth.

Nabal. Doeg, thou speakest wisely and behold
The time is now at hand to serve thy will,
For but to-day certain of David's band
Which hideth upon Carmel near my sheep,
Came unto me to beg a little food.

Doeg. Then is the fox indeed in woeful part.
These tidings give me joy and I will send
In haste upon the morrow for a troop
Which tarrieth at Hebron, with command
To compass all these outcasts in distress
And make an end of them.

Ishbosheth. The stars in truth
Are gracious unto us. Rejoice with me,
O Phaltiel, that comfort is so nigh.
A little time and we shall go from hence
With David's head unto my father's courts
To hear him shout for joy and to behold
The woe of Jonathan.

Doeg. Grant that I bear
Again unto the king Goliath's sword
Which I beheld Ahimelech the priest
Give unto David with the hallowed bread
From off the altar. It befitteth me
To thus delight thy father.

Ishbosheth. It is well.

Nabal. Then shall ye say, "Nabal, the mighty man
Of Maon told us where the fellow hid
For love of thee, O king. Is it not meet
That thou shouldst recompense him?" Say ye so.
And fail ye not to say "for love of thee."

Doeg. Thou shalt have honor, Nabal, in the ear
Of Saul for all thy bounty unto us.
But if thou verily wouldst gain his love,

Give me a talent of silver to provide
Our purse and recompense his men of war
Whom I shall call from Hebron.

Nabal. Hath the king
No money for them?

Doeg. He doth pay the host
Such wages as he may, but thou dost know
That, with the burden of Philistine strife
And this rebellion of David in our midst,
The kingdom's treasury doth not abound
With riches for its servants. Furthermore,
This crafty shepherd hath so oft escaped
Out of the snares which Saul doth set for him,
That men have lost their spirit to pursue
And vex themselves; nay, even do they talk
In David's praise. Which thing is perilous,
And needeth greater bounty to subdue.
Now, therefore, in his last extremity,
Give thou, that we may make an end of him.

Nabal. If thou wilt give me pledge of due reward
In profitable stewardship, or charge
Of goodly surety for the host's supply
From these my flocks, my talent shall be thine,
And yet five hundred shekels.

Doeg. Verily,
I cannot make a pledge to thee for Saul,
But, since I am chief herdsman of the king,
I can withhold his cattle that they fail
Of increase as aforetime, and behold,
Thou shalt receive command in thy desire.

Ishbosheth. What do ye say together at my back
Ye hoary usurers?

Doeg. Why dost thou heed?
We talk of how this David may be snared.

Ishbosheth. Wait for the morrow. Ye are now too
grave.

Let David starve and take your cups again.

Phaltiel. Nay, let them catch this fellow speedily,
Delaying naught that hasteneth his death.
He standeth in my way, nor do I sleep
In peace with Michal for the fear of him.
Moreover, I would take her hence with me
To Egypt from the troubles of the land
That she forget her cares in bounteous ease,
And, while this outlaw tarrieth with his troop
Amid the wilderness unto the south,
I dare not pass.

Ishbosheth. Thou fearest not in vain,
For he would verily tear thy heart from thee
As thou hast seen the vultures tear a kid.

Phaltiel. Cease, Ishbosheth, if thou wouldst have me
stay
To drink with thee, for thou dost make me cold.

Ishbosheth. Drink quickly then, unloose thy girdle
well,
Take thee strong drink, a mighty jar of wine
Unto thyself alone would not suffice
To give thee courage when one uttereth
The name of David.

Phaltiel. Nay, I fear him not,
But I would be something more valorous
If I had not his wife to think upon,
Seeing that Michal hath no love for me.
She dreams of him. Her heart hath peace no more.
She fretteth in despite at every man,

Now at her father's violence of will,
And yet again at David's evil lot;
The while her tongue revileth whatsoe'er
I do before her.

Ishbosheth. Drink thou yet again.

Phaltiel. Nay, I have drunk enough, for I am sick—
Sick unto vomiting.

Ishbosheth. O, fy on thee,
Thou art a boy, thou canst not hold thy wine.
Here, Nabal, let thy servants take away
This suckling prince. He leaveth us the more.

[Servants lead Phaltiel forth.]

Nabal. Nay, be ye princes, lords or what ye will,
Nabal hath wine enough. Aye, wine for all,
Though ye should drink as horses. Fill your cups.
Doeg, thy cup is empty. Hither girl,
Fill mighty Doeg's cup, aye, fill his throat,
If he doth gape at thee, and leave awhile
Thy doting on yon Ziphite. This is wine
Worthy our valleys whence, as ye do know,
My forefather old Caleb stole the grapes
Before he seized the land that nourished them.
Aye, that old spy was wise, I warrant ye,
And knew a goodly vintage. Drink ye, all,
To honor him.

Ishbosheth. If he had wine like this,
I marvel not he gave so willingly
Unto his daughter Achsah, when she wed,
Alike the upper and the nether springs,
For who would taste of water after it?

Nabal. Thou speakest as a worthy son of Saul.
Harken, ye lords, drink as my damsels fill
And deem your golden cups no less a thing

Than their fair breasts, free offered to your lips.

[*Abigail cometh to the door and tarrieth
behind its curtain.*]

So be ye merry all. Drink, mighty men,
Nabal hath plenty for ye. He is rich
Owning the half of Carmel. He hath flocks
Exceeding all his neighbors in the land,
And many bondsmen and fair concubines,
Aye, and a wife, could ye but see his wife,
Ye princes and ye captains, ye would swear
Her comeliness was fashioned for desire.

Guests. Let us behold her. Drink to Nabal's wife.

Abigail [unseen]. Thou fool, I am accurséd that thy
lips

Have ever touched me, more polluted far
Than if thy swine had slept upon my bed.
Behold I came thinking to rescue thee
And I am come in vain, am come to find
That, in the place of armed vigilance
Whereby the wise would guard themselves secure,
Thou liest witless in the nakedness
Of brutish lusts, in foolishness of wine,
Tempting destruction which delayeth yet
A little longer, knowing she may choose
What time she will to slay thee. [Departeth.]

Nabal. Let me drink,

If ye have wives as comely, unto them.

Ishbosheth. Nay, let not any drink to any wife
Save he can boast her beauty and desire.

Nabal. Let each drink to another's, or let us drink
To some sweet concubine from heathen gates
Of lustful eyelids and lascivious lips
Who waiteth now, reproachful of delay.

Ishbosheth. Provoke me not, O Nabal, in such wise
And give me not such wine, or, by the gods,
My lust shall search thy house for what it will.

Nabal. My house is thine, my prince, aye all within,
Its fairest woman thine.

Doeg. Hold, stay ye here,
Ye both are drunken. Ye do mar the feast.

Ishbosheth. Thou liest, we are not as drunk as thou.

Doeg. Then are ye mad as David was at Gath
In fear of Achish, yet ye feign it not
As did this Levite fox. Ye feign it not.
Ye are created fools. Yea, thou and he—
Both of ye, come thou merry damsel here
And give me wine. I swear by ancient Lot
I have not drunk enough.

Nabal. What sayest thou,
Thou curséd Edomite? What tale is this
Of David?

Doeg. Have they told thee naught of it?
Yet here in little Maon thou, indeed,
Who hast so great a sweating of conceit,
Shouldst only know of Nabal. Harken then,
David, that godly man, when he had made
A lie to old Ahimelech and fed
Upon the hallowed bread before mine eyes,
He and his troop, lo, he mistrusted me
As I was doing service of the Lord,
Whereat he fled to Gath, mark thou my words,
Unto its king—the foe of Israel,
And being there, he trembled yet again
For fear of Achish—this was told to me
By certain of the captives in our wars—

And changéd his behavior unto them,
Feigné a madness, scrabbled on the doors
And let his spittle fall upon his beard,
Until they thrust him forth to go his way.
What thinkest thou? Shall Saul abide our king
Or such a fellow reign in Israel?
If both be mad, Saul's way is worthier choice.
Speak, Ishbosheth, my prince, what aileth thee?
Wilt thou not waken? Stay, regard him not,
He is another Phaltiel in his wine.

Nabal. Come hither, servants, take the prince from
hence

Our vintage is too strong.

Doeg. Stand ye apart,
I will go with him also. 'Tis enough.

Nabal. Nay, tarry yet with me. The dawn is nigh.
Let us be merry, let us mock the night.

Doeg. Entreat me not. Bid thou thy friends depart
And let us to our couches. I must sleep
Before I snare that curse of Israel.

*[Ishbosheth is carried forth and Doeg followeth
after him.]*

Nabal. So be it, then. Ye neighbors, mighty men,
The feast is ended. I have fed ye well.
What say ye? Have ye had as goodly wine
As this from any lord of Canaan's best?
Go to your beds, ye who can lift yourselves,
And ye who cannot walk as ye are wont
My men shall lead. Good sleep attend ye all.

*[The Guests go forth, aided by the Servants. Nabal's
Steward alone remaineth.]*

Open the lattice, steward, that the air
Of morning may refresh me. I am dull

From wine, for I did hold the cup with all
And crafty Doeg only, drinking less,
Withstood thy master. Thou hast served me well.
The feast was worthy princes and all the land
Shall hear henceforth of Nabal's mightiness.
But go thou straightway to the servants' court
And gather what remaineth of the wine,
That none be wasted in their rioting.
The rich when they are drunken serve me best,
The poor man serveth not in any wise
When he hath all he will. Have thou a care
To hear the prince and Doeg when they wake
And do thou whatsoever pleaseth them.

[*The Steward goeth forth.*]

Now is the sum of all my feast a waste
If Saul doth not reward me. Verily
He cannot fail to give me stewardship
Where I shall gather shekels, aye, enough
To fill yon empty wine jars to the neck
And overflow them. Surely such a wine
Meriteth only gold to take its room
And give me consolation for the loss.
They drank of it like camels. Ishbosheth
Was but a skin wherein they measured it
Unto the bursting; Phaltiel did suck
Like any kid restoréd to its dam,
And these my neighbors did avenge themselves
Most mightily for any tribute past.
But it is ended. Lo, the morning breaks.
The gods have mingled water with their wine
And cast the lees athwart the widening east
To stain the cold beginning of the day.

[*Abigail entereth.*]

Who cometh hither? Art thou Abigail?
But wherefore comest thou at such an hour
Appareled as for journeying. Cast off
This fleece of chastity which girdeth thee
And come my fairest ewe, come thou anigh
That I may shear thee.

Abigail. Nabal, stay thy hand.
This is no season for thy foolishness
To sport with me. The lion of the tribe
Of Judah croucheth at thy very gates
Waiting to spring. I have delivered thee
To-night, but now beware. The watch is thine.

Nabal. Woman, what doth thy babbling signify?
Hast thou become a prophet of the land
To talk in riddles and to say dark things?

Abigail. Hear me, O Nabal, for my words shall draw
The dreadful sword of truth from out the sheath
Of fond dissimulation, and take heed,
Lest it destroy thee. Nigh thy very door,
As I have said, David is in the way.
The robber and the outcast of thy scorn,
The hireling of the Levites, yet, withal,
That champion protected of the Lord
Who liveth in the faith of Israel;
He, even he, in bitterness of wrath
For thy reproach of those who follow him,
Hath purposed to destroy thee from the earth
And all thy house. Whereof in time forewarned,
I hastened, yesterday, to turn his will
From slaying thee, and carried food to him

And pled with him to spare us and forgive
Thy scorn unto his men who came to thee.

Nabal. Thou wentest unto him?

Abigail. Aye, God be praised.

Nabal. And pledest with him?

Abigail. Aye, upon my face
For mercy, since his wrath was unto death.

Nabal. And gavest of my riches unto him?

Abigail. A little food, but this and these my prayers
Have savéd us.

Nabal. My curse upon thy head
That thou didst go to meet this hireling,
This dog of Samuel. Did I tell thee not
Thou art a wanton. Thus thou provest it
And I do curse thee.

Abigail. Curse thou not the hand
That hath delivered thee.

Nabal. Then by the gods
Of all the heathen, curse I David's soul.

Abigail. They cannot harm him. He defieth them.
Through love of One, the Lord of Israel,
Who is his sure defense. And curse thou not
This David, lest he hear thee even now
And smite thy house with thee.

Nabal. Why should I fear
The rage of one who fleeth to the rocks
With but a feeble remnant of his band,
And beggeth meat? Accurséd be his name.

Abigail. Hear me, thou knowest not thine enemy.
His wrath is as a whirlwind and his sword
As lightning in the tempest. After him
Are come to thee four hundred arméd men.

Nabal. Four hundred—four?

Abigail. Aye, all of proven might
And he hath yet two hundred more behind.

Nabal. It is a host beyond my hope's defense,
What shall I do? Ye gods, what can I do
To stay them from my riches and my blood?

Abigail. They are no common foemen, for their souls
Are not less strengthened by chill of woes
Than are their swords which from the hammer's rage
Are thrust amid the waters.

Nabal. Are they nigh?

Abigail. Aye, under yonder hill I saw their strength
At evening yesterday and stayed their feet
From treading on our necks ere they should smite
Unto the heart.

Nabal. My God, where shall I flee?
And here is Ishbosheth, son of the king
Drunken within my house, and Phaltiel,
And Doeg. If I flee and they be slain,
I am accursed of Saul for evermore.
But wherefore flee? I am ensnaréd now.
The robbers are about me. Shall they spare,
Whom I have mocked, or guard, whom I reviled?
My flocks shall all be scattered utterly,
My treasure be divided as a spoil
By David and his hirelings. May the curse
Of every god the tongue of man hath known
Alight upon them, turning into naught
The lord of robbers, praised of Israel.
O! mercy, O!

Abigail. What hast thou?

Nabal. Here, a pain,
I cannot breathe, ye gods! I cannot breathe,
Yea, here, about my heart. Call thou for aid.

Abigail. Help! help! let any come. Nabal is ill.

Nabal. Go, woman, quickly. Curséd be the day
That—O, what woe is this—that David came,
That dog of Samuel—bring thou help to me,
I am undone—help!—a physician—help!
Dost thou not hear me—help!

Steward [*entering*]. What wouldst thou,
My mistress?

Abigail. Hasten hither, for thy lord
Is sorely smitten. Bring whoe'er ye may
To succor him. Help!—where are all the house?

Steward. Many are sleeping from the weariness
Of this night's mighty feast, and not a few
Are drunken from the lees.

Abigail. Lo, there are yet
Two servants faithful as thyself hath been.

[*Two Servants run in.*]

Bear ye your master quickly to his bed
And seek him a physician. Is the pain
Upon thee still, O Nabal?

Steward. He cannot speak,
He seemeth dead and heavy as a stone,
Haste, fellows, but a little duty more,
And our long oppression hath an end,
For Nabal's churlishness hath run its course
Since now a righteous Master bendeth him.

[*Servants bear out Nabal.*]

Abigail. If it should be, even as he hath said,
Then is my bitter service also done,
And I, the richest clad of Nabal's slaves

And highest set in mocking dignity,
Am free as well. This is a joy too fair
For daring hope to cherish lest, betimes,
The stupor, gotten in excess of wine
Should pass away from him as hitherto
It hath befallen, leaving unto us
The desolation of his pride enthroned
And hardened to new iniquity.
But stay thee, desperate heart, what strives within?
Art thou indeed a murderer in desire
And driven by so dark a path to seek
The city of thy refuge? I indeed
Should thus accuse thee, were my master kind,
Loving and merciful, or even just,
And had I been a sorrow unto him,
But when his cruelty hath hedged in
The joyful expectation of my youth
With brutal lusts, base teachings, foolishness
Of pride which hath no measure, arrogance
Of evil and of might; then hath my heart
No guiltiness of blood if it await
With eagerness, the interceding hand
Of death to end my woes; if it do pray
That valorous David speedily possess,
With all that yet I am for love's desires,
Its adoration, faithful and complete.

PART V.

PLACE.—*The Camp of David in a grove near Maon. Abishai and several Soldiers beyond. David cometh forth from a tent.*

David. Dead! Nabal dead! Lest I believe it not,
I feign would tell my soul each happy hour
These tidings which but yesterday I heard,
Confounded by my joy, heard as one hears
The earthquake that breaketh down his prison wall
When he hath oft passed nights of secret toil
To cut the window bars, giving escape
Miraculous. Yea, I must still exclaim
As when I heard it, "Blesséd be the Lord
Who thus hath pled the cause of my reproach
From Nabal's hand and kept his servant free
Of evil, for the Lord hath now returned
The wickedness of Nabal on his head
And hath withheld me from iniquity,"
For I was sorely tempted of my heart
To eat the fruit forbidden its desire
As once, when faint, I ate of hallowed bread.
Yea, I was tempted to the uttermost,
For, since the days of youth, this heart of mine
Hath striven ceaselessly betwixt its zeal
For what is highest in the majesty
Of God's eternal reign of truth and love,
And what He hath in fullest beauty wrought
Upon the earth in woman's twofold grace
Of form and spirit, gentle and generous,

A thought divine in flesh, a charm supreme,
A living altar man may bow unto,
Uncertain if he worship it alone
Or give to the Creator greater praise.
Thus hath my soul contended at the sight
Of Abigail and God hath strengthened me.
Abishai, art thou there?

Abishai. Aye, it is I,
What wouldst thou, O David?

David. Thou dost know
When tidings came at eve of Nabal's death,
After ten days of doubt and lingering,
I said "Let us abide until the dawn
That they may bury him for, of a truth,
They will no longer tarry for his sake."
Therefore I sent to-day unto his house,
Even to Abigail the Carmelite,
Whose understanding and whose loveliness
Of countenance did overcome our wrath,
That they commune with her. Hath any come
To bring me answer?

Abishai. None has yet returned
But lo, is not the youth that hasteneth
Hither below a messenger of thine?

David. Yea, he is one of them and, though he rode
Upon an arrow driven from the bow
Of Jonathan, he could not come as soon
As my desire willeth. Verily
In all the fond impatience of my love
My heart should have bestowed to Asahel
Its urgent message, for his feet are swift
As are the roebuck's when he passeth through

The circuit of his hunters roundabout
And boundeth to his refuge in the hills.
Yet will I not reproach the lad so nigh
If he may bear the words mine ears attend.

[*A Messenger entereth.*]

Hast thou an answer? Hast thou seen the face
Of Abigail?

Messenger. My lord, I come to thee
Bearing her message.

David. Quickly.

Messenger. All is well.

David. The Lord is gracious. Tell me every whit
Of what hath come to pass since ye are gone.

Messenger. Behold, when we departed from the camp
We took the path—

David. Nay, speak not of the way,
Speak of the end, thy words to Abigail,
Her countenance, the words she answered thee;
Say all as thou wouldst tell if there had come
A shining angel to thee in the night;
Naught is too simple for my willing ears
If thou dost tell of Abigail.

Messenger. My lord,
I hear thee and obey. When we were come
To Nabal's house, they straightway led us in
Before the wife of Nabal.

David. Hold, thou fool,
Nabal is dead. Her name is Abigail.

Messenger. Forgive me, O my lord, I pray thee grant
Thy servant grace. I wot not what I spake.

David. Speak thou more wisely then and tarry not.

Messenger. When we had come to Abigail, behold
He who was first among us spake to her,
Saying, "Lo, David sendeth us to thee
To take thee to him, if thou wilt, to wife."
And she arose thereat from where she lay,
Bowing upon her face unto the earth,
And said, "Behold, let me, thine handmaiden,
Be servant unto ye to wash the feet
Of servants of my lord" and furthermore,
After the gracious manner of the speech
Of them of goodly station in the land,
Made she reply to us. Whereat, abashed
And witless from the rudeness of the camp,
We stammered there before her for a space.
Then, as she willed to straightway come to thee,
Thine elder servant bade me run before
To give thee tidings.

David. Thou hast served me well.
I shall reward thee. Seek thy needed rest.

[*The Messenger departeth.*

Rejoice with me, Abishai, at the words
The youth hath spoken. Lo the Carmelite,
Fair Abigail, doth journey even now
Hither to meet me. As thou lovest me,
I charge thee make all ready in the camp
To do her honor. Hasten. Tarry not.

[*Abishai goeth forth.*

This hour, O my harp, belongs to thee,
Which art alike consoler of my grief
And friend of my rejoicing, yea the guide
And full interpreter of all delight,
The ladder of my song, the golden tower
On which my soul surveyeth roundabout

The beautiful dominion of its peace.
He who was lost amid the wilderness
Hath now come forth; he who was driven thence
An outcast, now returneth to his own;
The weak hath gotten strength, the hungering
And thirsting one hath all his heart's desire.
Now is the scoffer smitten. Lo he stood,
As Carmel standeth, in the mightiness
Of all his pride before the sons of men
Which bowed down themselves that they might drink
The waters of his favor, and behold,
There where he stood, he standeth now no more;
The judgment of Jehovah's righteousness
Hath sought him out; the quaking of the Lord
Hath cleft his pillars; where the mountain rose
Before the envious eyes of Caleb's seed,
Naught but a cloud remaineth. He is not,
But over all the darkness of the cloud
Archeth the crimson bow wherewith the Lord
Hath shot the mighty arrow of His will
To bless my yearning heart abundantly
And sanctify my love beneath His own.
Therefore my song shall glorify my God
Who hath delivered me; my tongue shall tell
The wonders of His mercy and His might
Unto His servant, whom He raiseth up
From sore temptation and abounding woes.
Thus endeth bondage of more cruelty
Than iron chains and fetters, thus abates
Rebellion in my soul against the tribes
Of Israel that they should thrust me out,
And in my breast that no befitting heart
Was left in my distress to comfort me

And know the wasting tenderness of my love.
For in the priceless gift of Abigail
I joy in life again, in all the earth,
Yea, Philistines and Ziphites, evil men
Abhorred in the depths of my distress,
Have but to seek the palace of my soul
And know its bounty; God created them
And, by their persecution, do I know
The fulness of delight He giveth me;
Thus have they served His ways unwittingly,
And in this day of His redeeming grace
My joy sufficeth almost to forgive.
But what is this I see beyond the camp?
Behold she cometh—Abigail, mine own.
The company which now approacheth me
Can lead none other than the love I wait.
Yea, those who walk before, assuredly,
Are of my messengers and six who ride
Upon white asses wear the drapery
Of women, whereof five are as the leaves
Upon a stem and one the blushing rose
Which openeth its beauty to mine eyes.
Lie there, my harp, I need thee not to-night,
For I shall hear the voice of Abigail
In words of love so sweet, so passing sweet
Beyond the uttermost rapture of thy strings,
That were an instrument by angels wrought
To give its melodies without my tent
Stilling the dove's desire, it would be vain;
I should but hear the whispering of our bliss,
I should but hear the tenderness of one voice,
The voice of my beloved, my most fair.
Yea, sleep thou there, my harp, sleep soon and long

That jealousy may spare thee of its woe.
 And, O my sword, be thou removed from me
 To slumber also. I forsake thee not.
 Thou hast been ever true in perilous strife
 Since first I took thee from Goliath's thigh,
 But art too rude a friend for days of peace
 And dalliance of love. Grieve not that bliss
 Hath robbed thee of the bloodshed of revenge,
 For by some bitter prophecy from within
 I know that thou and I in days to come
 Shall be companions longer in distress
 And slaughter, shall be wed in grievous wars
 Longer than any woman to my rest
 And joy and blessing. Lo, they are at hand
 Whom I await and wherefore do I dream
 Of tribulation in forthcoming days?
 The rather let me wake unto the light
 Of this surpassing bounty of my God.

[*Messengers enter and bow before David.*]

1st Messenger. Behold, my lord, thy servants who are
 now

Returnéd unto thee and bring with them
 Her whom thou hast desired.

David. Ye are true
 And faithful servants.

[*Abigail entereth.*]

Abigail. David!

David. Abigail!

Abigail. My lord, as thou hast bidden, so I come
 To seek thee, being yet commanded first
 Of this my heart which serveth thine alone.

[*David leadeth Abigail apart.*]

David. The Lord be with thee. As my thirsting lips
Press on thine own the first long kiss of love,
The salutation of all hope fulfilled,
So may His mercy seek thee evermore,
His blessings dwell upon thee. Yet, behold,
If in thy soul there lingereth apart
A doubt of what thou doest, or a thought
That thou canst do none other than obey
With saving grace, for fear of armed men
Compelling thee; I swear before the Lord
That thou shalt go unhindered to thy house
And thy possessions. None shall do thee hurt
And, even as my young men kept the flock
From any peril in the wilderness,
So shall they with me guard thee roundabout
From any evil, thou and all thou hast
Going and coming freely.

Abigail. O my lord,
Canst thou not guard me better at thy side?
I have no doubt or fear. I come to thee,
And have no will henceforward to depart.
I come for the forever of my life,
For love which seemeth measureless of years,
For joy thou makest perfect. All I have
I give thee with myself to strengthen thee
And lift thee from the depths of thy distress
To smite thy foes again and overcome.
Then shall the persecuting wrath of Saul
Be brought to naught; the Levite shall return
To honor. He shall stand for righteousness
Before the altar and the sacrifice,
As Samuel ordered, glorifying God
Throughout the length and breadth of Israel,

Making the uttermost heathen fear his name.
Then, David, shall the faithful of the land
Remember all thy zeal and mightiness
And prove their love for thee, and set thee up
To rule them for Jehovah, and thy soul
For every sorrow now shall then receive
Blessing and consolation to the full.

David. Belovéd Abigail, if in my breast
It came to pass my soul should wither up
And leave it empty, I should not despair
Could thine abide as lovely in its place
As in the flesh before me, for thy zeal
Is purer, brighter, goodlier than mine own.
Thou art a new heart given unto me,
In living beauty wrought. Henceforth mine eyes
In seeing thee shall see my better self
And holy purpose, to reproach no more.

Abigail. My lord, I am not thus save as I glean
What thou hast planted, gathering the wheat
Of thine anointed faith and strength and love,
And noting not the tares by sorrow sown.
Lo, I am come to thee from Nabal's guile
Even as thou dost leave the wilderness
Behind thee for this land of fruitful vines
And flowing waters.

David. And how passing pure
And clear are now our living springs of love
Since we did wait in patience for the Lord
To bid us come and drink, suffering not
Desire with unlawful argument
And bloody hands to trouble and pollute
These grateful waters. Never, hitherto,
Hath evil so persuaded me to slay

As since I first beheld thy comeliness,
Heard thy meek pleading and, betwixt the charm
Of sight and understanding, knew that need
Which makes the heart rebellious to possess,
Whereunto Nabal's foolishness and sin
Did urge my soul the more, adding the shield
Of virtue to the dagger of desire.
But, notwithstanding my adversity,
Forsaken, as it seeméd, by the Lord,
I held unto the faith of Israel
And overcame. Now doth Jehovah bless.
But, since thou utterest the unclean name
Of Nabal, wilt thou tell me, Abigail,
Even before I suffer thee to rest,
Somewhat concerning him and how he died,
That I may understand if but the lot
Of any came to him, or if, in truth,
A judgment of Jehovah sought him out
In mercy unto us.

Abigail. It came to pass,
After the mighty feast that Nabal gave,
The day whereon I met thee in the way
To stay thy vengeance, that I sought him out,
At morning when the wine was out of him,
And told him thou wert nigh with arméd men
And of my going forth to plead with thee.
Whereat he waxéd wroth, and then a fear
Befell him as he thought upon thy might,
Dreading thy sword not only of himself
But for the mighty men who slept with him,
To his confusion.

David. Tell me, who were these?

Abigail. The chiefest of them all were Ishbosheth
And Phaltiel, the son and son-in-law
Of Saul the king, and one of mighty place
Called Doeg.

David. As the Lord doth live above,
Well might he be afraid. If I had known
That such accurséd foes, such scorpions
And vipers of my torment, were within
The house of Nabal, even thy sweet eyes
Thy pleading lips, so fashioned to beguile,
Might less have stayed my fury than the wind
Until my sword and good Abishai's might
Had made the marble floors of Nabal's house
Red with the heart's blood of mine enemies,
Mingled together fitly, running deep—
So deep that they who came when we were gone
Should say of Nabal's house "Herein behold
The winepress of the mighty man we knew,
And one hath broken it and all the jars,
That Nabal's wine is wasted utterly."
But tell me more, my wrath is now in vain.

Abigail. Then after all his feasting and his wine
And in the strife of sudden fear and rage,
Lo, Nabal fell before me as one falls
Who dieth, thereupon his servants ran
To cry without, and Doeg, hearing them,
Learned what had come to pass and hastened forth,
Shouting for Ishbosheth and Phaltiel,
And terror sobered them so that they fled,
They and their bondsmen, by the light of dawn
Upon the way to Hebron, running hence
As if the flames consumed us roundabout.

But Nabal lay sore stricken in his bed
As dead at heart and heavy as a stone,
Nor knew he any man, and yesterday,
After ten days of stupor, came the end,
For lo, the Lord smote Nabal that he died.
And no one in the house lamented him,
For he was very evil in his deeds,
A fool amid his riches and a hard
And cruel master, and we buried him.
Then, fearing some confusion in the house,
I slept not through the night, but with the sun
Thy servants came and I was strengthened
And joyfully turned hither for thy aid
And for the sure protection of thy love.
Thus hath the Lord released me unto thee
To be thy wife. My servants all are thine,
Thou shalt be lord of all that Nabal had,
And, since thou wert a shepherd in thy youth,
Thy wisdom best can rule that simple band
Which tendeth all the flock on Carmel's side,
And of these great possessions multiply
Bounty and blessing during happy years—
Years when my love shall recompense to thee
A thousand fold the day of bitterness
And wrath which brought me joy of Nabal's scorn.

David. Belovéd one, would that such days of peace
Awaited us as in thy countenance
Thou dost portray, but nevermore again
Shall I be shepherd, saving over hosts
Of armed men in pastures breeding strife.
The Lord hath other place awaiting me
And harder service, but, if thou art near,
These days of new delight shall bear increase

Of trustful courage and of valiant war,
My heart in thee, my spirit in the Lord
Sustained and pressing onward side by side.

Abigail. And, thou, beloved and cherished of my
heart,

Shalt prove thy might again and yet prevail
Over the craft of Saul and all his hosts,
Winning them unto thee and by the grace
Of God, becoming king of Israel.

BOOK III.

DAVID AND BATHSHEBA.

A WRITING IN FIVE PARTS.

FROM II SAMUEL, XI-XII.

DAVID AND BATHSHEBA.

THE PERSONS WHO HOLD DISCOURSE IN THIS WRITING.

DAVID, *King of Israel and Judah.*

URIAH, *a Captain over thousands.*

JOAB, *Chief Captain of the Host.*

NATHAN, *a Prophet.*

ELIAM, *Father of Bathsheba.*

JEHOSHAPHAT, *Chronicler.*

ABISHAI, *Brother of Joab, a Captain over thousands.*

FOUR SOLDIERS.

A STEWARD.

THREE ELDERS.

Other Soldiers, Messengers, Servants of the Palace and Attendants in the Camp, people of Jerusalem.

BATHSHEBA, *Wife of Uriah, afterwards of David.*

ABIGAIL, *David's wife.*

MAACAH, *David's wife.*

TWO HANDMAIDENS.

The Places where these Persons hold discourse are the Camp before Rabbah, the House of Eliam, various rooms of the Royal Palace in Jerusalem, a street and the place before the Tabernacle.

DAVID AND BATHSHEBA.

THE PARTS AND PLACES SET IN ORDER.

PART I.

PLACE I. *The Camp before Rabbah.* Soldiers; Joab, Uriah, Abishai and Attendants.

PLACE II. *The House of Eliam.* Eliam, Bathsheba, Nathan; Bathsheba.

PART II.

PLACE I. *The Palace of David.* David, Jehoshaphat; David.

PLACE II. *A street in Jerusalem.* Nathan.

PLACE III. *The Palace of David.* David, Bathsheba.

PART III.

PLACE I. *A room in the Palace.* David; David and Uriah; Steward.

PLACE II. *A court of the Palace.* Abigail, Maacah, Handmaid.

PLACE III. *A room in the Palace,* David, Steward; David, Uriah; David.

PART IV.

PLACE I. *The House of Eliam.* Bathsheba.

PLACE II. *The Camp before Rabbah.* Joab, Abishai; Joab, Uriah; Joab; Joab, Uriah; *Soldiers;* Joab and *Soldiers;* Joab, Uriah, *Soldiers;* Joab, *Messengers.*

PART V.

PLACE I. *A room in the Palace.* David, Bathsheba; David, Nathan; David, *Servants;* David; David, *Servants;* Abigail, Maacah, David.

PLACE II. *The same.* David, Steward, *Servants.*

PLACE III. *Chamber of Bathsheba.* Bathsheba, Nathan; Bathsheba, Nathan, David; Bathsheba, David.

PLACE IV. *Before the Tabernacle.* David, Nathan and all characters, except Bathsheba, and Populace.



DAVID AND BATHSHEBA.

DAVID AND BATHSHEBA.

PART I.

PLACE I. The Camp of the Army of Israel before the besieged city of Rabbah. Several Soldiers.

1st Soldier. Well, stripling, doth a siege delight thy heart?

2nd Soldier. Had I thy flesh, I might as slothful be
As thou art and make merry, but my will
Seeketh more active service.

1st Soldier. Did the war
Lead us to open battle, I might wage
The earliest rain of darts would teach thy feet
A service active e'en as Asahel's,
Yet otherwise than in the rash pursuit
Of such fierce game as Abner.

2nd Soldier. As for thee,
Thou dost, it seemeth, love this slothful war
Of crafty plot or jealous subterfuge
Which sullen Joab is content to make,
But I am here perforce and wait the time
When brave King David takes the field again,
To dye my spear 'mid his impetuous charge.

1st Soldier. Stripling, have heed, such witless words
as these
Our captain, Joab, would but ill endure,
If they should reach him. E'en the war horse feels

The gadfly's bite and sometimes deigns to crush
The brief offender.

3rd Soldier. Comrades, have an end
Of further strife, enough will come to pass
For equal burden and deciding proof.

1st Soldier. Aye, but shall I, who served of old with
Saul
And bear full many scars from bloody wars
Since I have followed David—scars from strife
With Philistines and Moabites, with hosts
Of Syria and Edom,—shall I hear
This stripling babble of my loyal past—
This boy too young to trust in perilous war
As I am e'en too old?

3rd Soldier. Enough of this,
No need hast thou, old comrade, of defense
For us and why then make one. All alike,
Whether directed by stern Joab's craft,
Abishai's valor or Benaiah's might,
In weary siege or warfare made afield,
Though faithful to the captain of our choice,
Raise, all, united voice to praise the king.

All Soldiers. The king! The king!

1st Soldier. Aye, all acclaim the king,
Most valorous of warriors, asking none
To do what he would dare not. In his youth
Hailed as a chieftain from Goliath's death,
And pressing, each on each, his mighty deeds
So closely that, despite his will, the sun
Of jealous Saul in his new glory paled.
Give me a king who singly wins his crown
By warlike valor, leading men in acts

And not besieging them by flooding words,
A king whom brave men hail and women love.

2nd Soldier. Aye! what a speedy conquest doth he
make

When comeliness disputes him.

1st Soldier. Stripling, now
Thou canst discourse with more of certainty
Than of the wars anon.

All Soldiers. Well hit, well said.

3rd Soldier. Yet one more dart, but comrade, spare
the boy;

We know our valor is but half repaid
If woman's smile greets not our rudest face
And envy these smooth cheeks when they have leave
To know Jerusalem's pleasures.

2nd Soldier. There, indeed,
The words of Saul's fair minstrels echo still
In brave King David's honor and renown.
No woman, while her comeliness endures,
But hastens when men shout "The king doth pass"
And blushes if but for an instant rests
On her the glance of those exalted eyes,
And, when from Zion he goes down to war
And elders whisper, fearful of its ills,
And here and there a woman may bemoan
A husband's peril or a lover's hurt,
Then Israel's fair ones wear a weary face,
Nor any tidings heed until the shout
Of messengers proclaims the king's return.

3rd Soldier. O that the siege were done and we were
free

To share again the glory of such war
As David leads when he doth draw his sword.

2nd Soldier. Aye, would this siege were over. Joab lags

In vain pretense before these haughty walls
And breaks not their defiance.

1st Soldier. Boy, be still,
Our general comes.

[*Joab, Uriah, Abishai and Attendants enter.*]

Joab. Soldiers, what tidings here?
Have any movements on yon battlements
Betokened peril to your steadfast lines
Or check to slow advances?

1st Soldier. None, my lord,
The hot day drags as others have and here
In watchful service we have seen no sign
Of life beyond, save, ever and anon,
Some petulant arrow or outplunging stone
Of rattling catapult from the foe's defense
To keep us in our trenches, half ashamed.

Joab. Be patient yet a little. We shall take
Ere long delay, due vengeance for our toil. [*Aside.*]
Would I could give my patience that restraint
Which I enforce on others, for it strains
Hard in its harness, and, unawed as theirs
Before me, ever clamors angrily,
As I deem theirs may do beyond my ear,
For action, blood and conquest and its spoil.
Cooped in their walls, this flock of Ammonites—
This remnant of a nation I have driven
As birds before a storm-cloud—do defy
My baffled craft and make me a reproach
To envious captains, e'en a weariness
To my impetuous king who, now withdrawn
From war's beguilements for a kingdom's cares,

Impatient waits for tidings of success
In beautiful Jerusalem. Nor, the while,
May I be heedless of his watchful eyes,
For his supremacy is not a crown
Of aged wisdom impotent in strife,
But with a warrior's cunning he surveys
My strategy unblinded and beneath
There broods distrustfully, my soul forewarns,
The memory of that bloody argument
In retribution of a brother's death
Which I sustained with Abner when, in fear
Of guilt betrayed, he plotted to desert
His king and cousin Saul for David's star,
Threatening thus my hard won leadership
By claims of early favor and renown.
Yea, Joab, thou hast reason to beware
And urge ambition not for gain alone
But that its purpose unachieved may give
Pursuing fate her moment to destroy.
Behold one comes whose spirit in its zeal
Imperils mine. I needs must check its flight.

[*Uriah approacheth.*

Uriah. My general, seeing we have made our course
Throughout these compassing and fixed lines
Which gird the life of Ammon, and, perchance,
That thou hast leisure to debate the siege,
May I disclose a scheme which ever builds
Persistently its fabric in my thought?

Joab. Speak on, Uriah. Sometimes those who gaze
Do note advantage which is unforeseen
By him who may sustain the battle's toil.

Uriah. Joab, I thank thee, I do venture thus
Abashed to aid thy proven generalship

Because my eager will to bear some part
In pressing on the cause of Israel
And adding yet a glory to our king
Doth loyal motive give to venturing mind.
This thing is my device. Proud Rabbah's walls
Are kept by many waters from the chance,
On divers sides, of prosperous attack.
There are but left the northern battlements
So grimly guarded and the city gates
Which open eastward for our warlike hope;
Thus, with our engines from the north advanced
And all that host arrayed, the foe might deem
Our blow from thence preparéd. Yet, erewhile,
Our care would be the gates, for, heaping up
With daring hands such fuel as would guide
The flames' invasion, we should soon provoke
An issue of the desperate Ammonites
And seem to flee before them, until men
In hiding should our subtle strife partake,
Put down the foe dismayed and sweep within
The open gates beseeching their return.

Joab. A valorous device is this of thine
But bloody in fulfilment, and it calls
For captains of no common hardihood.
Full many here, who in the battle's rage
Have put to flight an hundred arméd foes,
Would stay ere rendering to eager death
Such double vantage—one in open strife,
And one impending ever from the walls.
Not with an undue haste may we approve
Of this device, Uriah, so abide
In vigilant duty for a little time
Until again we meet for conference.

My captains, I attend ye. It must be
The hour of noon, to judge by hunger's cry,
And, since King Hanun wills not to molest
From yonder lofty tower our simple feast,
Seek we its brief repose and needed cheer.

[*All go forth.*]

*PLACE II. The house of Eliam in Jerusalem. Eliam and
Bathsheba, the former readeth a scroll, the latter meditateth.*

Bathsheba. Father, I hear a footstep in the court.

Eliam. It is the step of Nathan. Lo, he comes.

[*Nathan entereth.*]

Hail! honored Nathan, this our poor abode
Gains from thy friendly presence higher joy.

Nathan. My good Eliam, hail! a fellowship
Of wise discourse attracts me to thy door.
What tidings hast thou heard from Joab's host?
Bathsheba, doth our brave Uriah well?

Bathsheba. Full well, reveréd Nathan, if report
Of other tongues be true, for from my lord
I get but scanty words, so much is fixed
His mind on every peril of the siege.

Nathan. He hath a noble zeal and these are days
When duty fain must put all armor on
To force its high intent and win its war.

Bathsheba. But lesser duties starve while great ones
strive.

Eliam. Daughter, be patient, overcome this mood
Which frets in vain. Seek happier employ
In study of these scrolls whereon the wise
Have given their thought eternity.

Nathan. And find
Moreover, good Bathsheba, what is graced

With all imagination's richest gems,
The history of the patriarchs wherein
Is Rachel's patience written—the discourse
Of patient Job, that rainbow of our faith
Whose tears are full of tints beyond compare.

Bathsheba. Wise Nathan, I have gleaned in studious
youth

From these ripe fields and, in the fuller life
Of womanhood, would rather hear sweet words
Than read them in the black toil of the scribe.
Scarce won in wedlock, I am left alone,
My lord Uriah, in the lust of war,
Forgetting those fond praises which beguiled
My eager hearing. Naught doth fill the void
Of my half-orphaned life but such brief balm
As my fond father 'mid his toil bestows,
Or, in the street, some wandering minstrel yields
By singing golden verses of the king.

Nathan. Aye, truly are they golden and the grace
Of ancient days seems living in his song.

Eliam. Thou speakest warmly, Nathan, of our king,

Nathan. How else may I of one so fully blessed,
Called by the Lord His servant and His son.
My age turns from its hallowed treasury
To wonder at the riches which his youth
Hath heaped together. Not alone in war
This shepherd boy now stands without a foe,
As tens of thousands by his valor slain
Give ghostly witness, but in things of state
His judgment finds no equal, no dispute.
When, weary of the nation's cares, he turns
To music's soothing charm, no other hand

Can match his skilled persuasion of the harp
To vibrant harmonies, the while his soul
Such song inspires, such eloquence of tongue,
That none in Israel dare the poet's art
Except in secret and vain mimicry.

Bathsheba. And, with such matchless blessings, surely
none

In Israel is of more kingly form
Or perfect grace of countenance, or held,
So say they, to possess more winning speech.
Is this thing true? O Nathan, much revered,
Thou, surely, who hast converse as a friend
With this our noble king, can best acquaint
My humble wish to measure all his worth.

Nathan. It is most true, Bathsheba, that the king
Is gracious in his speech, exceeding all
The smoothest tongues of Israel when he wills,
Nor less true that none other, in his wrath,
Can so o'erwhelm with terror those who hear.

Eliam. And is not this a peril to the land?

Nathan. Thou speakest truth, Eliam, and I dread
At times the outcome of the royal rage,
But, happily, there is a judge within
Our David's bosom of more righteous will
Than those by men appointed, it is this
That chains rebellious temper and desire
And oft condemns to greater punishment
His own high errors than his subject's sins.
His true soul loves the one and only God
And since his very childhood hath his heart—
Abounding in affection, generous,
Wasteful of love, if such a thing may be—
His heart, I say, hath found its highest joy,

Its love supreme, unsatisfied of earth
Or any lesser converse, in the full
Ecstatic adoration of the Lord.
This heavenly passion hath his arm upheld
In life's full score of dangers and hath swept
His bloody sword in terrible revenge
And pitiless hate upon his heathen foes.
The Holy One hath not unmindful been
Of zeal which ever hath with power grown
And daily singeth grateful songs of praise,
Therefore the Lord is with him and bestows
Gifts which seem marvelous to blinded eyes,
Yet which descend as the divine reward.
But, friends, I must depart. The falling sun
On yon high wall of Zion bids me cease
For Zadok and Ahimelech, the priests,
Await me ere the evening sacrifice.
God keep thee, good Eliam and thy child.
Farewell, Bathsheba.

Bathsheba. Holy seer, farewell.

Eliam. Let me conduct thee to the portico.

[*Nathan and Eliam go forth.*]

Bathsheba. "Wasteful of love, if such a thing may be,"
Strange words are these of Nathan, oh so strange
To this my hungering heart. It hungers, thirsts,—
Aye! like a flower it thirsts in all its lack,
Not only of the bounty of the rain
But of the secret dew of gentle words
Which make life fragrant. Come, Uriah, back
From hateful wars to talk to me again,
For greater joy had I in hearing thee,
Close at my side, disposing zealously
Our lives, united, to forthcoming years,

Than have I now, uncircled by thine arm,
In strictest faith of thy unswerving course
Or full assurance of high honors won.
These were my hopes when thou didst whisper them,
They shall be my delight but when thy voice
Confirms them mine in its sweet love of old.
"Wasteful of love." This is a royal wealth
Beyond all other. Happy, verily,
Is he who hath it when contentious claims
Of envy and suspicion, faithlessness,
Hypocrisy and countless ills of state
Drain not the treasury of kingly trust
In men about his throne, but rather find
A bounty overflowing, a mercy taught
By trial to draw others forth from woe—
That mercy pure which is unselfish love,
Lacking but comeliness and fitting years
In those it blesses to love's garlands wear.
O great King David, in thy fair abode
Of stone and cedar carved so cunningly
By Hiram's craftsmen—and in thy fair self
So wondrously wrought by hands divine,
What joy thy heart must have in exercise
Of love so inexhaustible and deep—
A fountain pulsing upward to the skies
And satisfying every thirst below;
What peace they needs must keep who know the bliss
Of such a love's bestowal—they who hear
The voice that utters Israel's noblest song
Softened to charm their ever willing ears.
Live on, great king, and if thy heart at times
Seems emptied of the bounty it bestows,
May some pure spirit go to thee in dreams

To show thee that, for all thy seeming waste
Of outward love, hearts numberless supply,
In tender reverence and secret prayers,
The sources of its fulness from their own.

[*A Handmaid entereth.*]

Handmaid. Fair mistress, on thy pleasure I attend
To serve thee at the bath which now awaits.

Bathsheba. Thy voice is welcome, for the heat to-day
Hath passed its wont and given to my blood
An undue riot which the bath will chide.

PART II.

PLACE I. The Palace of David at Jerusalem. An upper room opening upon a portico. David reclining on a couch. Jehoshaphat sitteth by a table on which are many scrolls.

David. Then, good Jehoshaphat, is this thy task
As chronicler of my fair kingdom's course
In faithful record finished? What is writ
Since thou hast told the love of Abigail
And Carmel's woes ending in Nabal's death?

Jehoshaphat. Here, O my lord, the record followeth
Of Saul's pursuit amid the wilderness
Of Ziph, again to snare thee, when again
Thy reverence delivered him from death,
Twice merciful when he was at thy feet
Though twice his javelin had sought to slay.
Then didst thou refuge seek a second time
With Achish King of Gath who favored thee,
And with thy faithful troop didst smite the land
Toward the south and many nations thence.
Whereat they rose against thee in an host
At Jezreel, and Achish, fearing them,
Bade thee depart. Lo! when thou didst return
To Ziklag, the Amalekites had come
And burned the city, taking hence with them
The wives and children of thy followers
And thy two wives, whereat, in thy distress
And all their grief, thou didst beseech the Lord.
Then did thy valor all His word fulfil
In mighty battle, getting back the spoil

And captives from thy love by heathen foes,
And many cattle; sharing, by thy law,
Alike with those who fought or watched the camp,
And sending gifts to many friends afar.
Now doth the record,—shall I read, my lord?—
Tell of the woeful death of Jonathan
And that of Saul the king, by his own hand
In the despair of Philistine defeat;
It telleth also, when the tidings came,
Of all thy anguish and thy beauteous song
Of lamentation, when thy valiant soul
Forgot offense in honor of thy king
And thy heart's highest love embalmed thy friend.

David. Vainly, for his all woman's love excelled,
Words can no more build that pure spirit's worth
Than the great tomb my gratitude would raise.

Jehoshaphat. Now are we come to when thou wentest
up

To Hebron with thy household, and the men
Of Judah there anointed thee their king
Upon the death of Saul, while Ishbosheth
Was made by Abner king of Israel
After his father. Then, by Joab's will,
Thy servants at the pool of Gibeon
With equal twelve of Abner's servants died
In bloody strife, whereat a battle spread.
Thy men prevailed, howbeit Abner slew
Fleet Asahel and sought for peace with thee.
And thou wast king in Hebron seven years
And there six sons were born. Ahinoam
Bore Amnon first to thee, and Abigail
Thy second, Chileab. Then Maacah
Fair Absalom begat and Haggith gave

Thee Adonijah, Shephatiah came
Of Abital's desire, and the sixth
Was Ithream by thy wife Eglah born.

David. Fair women all and loving well their lord,
But Maacah the proudest gift hath made.
Read on to me.

Jehoshaphat. Lo, after weary war
Between thy house and that of Ishbosheth
Thine waxéd stronger and, for a reproach
Concerning Rizpah won to his desire,
Did mighty Abner wrothful leave his king
And league with thee and unto thee restore,
By Ishbosheth's consent, thy wife of youth
Michal, and lo, behind her, Phaltiel
Went weeping unto Bahurim, there turned
By Abner who came on to feast with thee
And go in peace, but jealous Joab sought
And treacherously slew him and thy love
Of honorable valor turned thy heart
From Joab cursed, to mourn the son of Ner
With tears and fasting. Likewise did thy soul
Avenge the blood of weakened Ishbosheth
Upon the men who slew him in his bed,
Though at his death all Israel made thee king,
Telling thy fame. Then thirty were thy years
When thou didst on Jerusalem turn thine eyes
And battle with the scoffing Jebusites,
From Zion's stronghold thrusting all their host
To make this hill the city of thy love
And grow in greatness, favored by the Lord.
Then didst thou build a house to thee, wherein
Were other wives espoused and sons begot.
Here I record how Hiram honored thee

With gifts, and tell of Baal Perazim
Where the Philistines did again assail
Thy might which, as a breach of waters, swept
Their hosts before thee. Wherefore in thy peace,
After its good to Obed-edom's house,
The holy ark was brought at length to rest
In Zion. And upon that joyful day
Of blessing, feast and offering to the Lord,
When thou didst dance, proud Michal spoke with scorn,
And henceforth knew thy early love no more.
Then did the prophet Nathan tell to thee
Jehovah's will to bless thee and thy reign,
And to appoint a place for Israel
After its wanderings, to dwell secure.
Moreover did He promise that thy seed
Should build for Him and Israel's heritage
A house to dwell in, holy to His name,
That He would be a father to thy son,
Establishing thy kingdom and thine house
And throne forever.

David. Lo, I search in vain
Why upon me such wondrous blessing falls,
Or what it meaneth for the years to be.
What is there yet?

Jehoshaphat. Then did thy might subdue
The Philistines and Moab and destroy
The host of Hadadezer and possess
Damascus and the cities of the east,
Gaining great spoil of silver, brass and gold
Which thou didst dedicate unto the Lord.
Then was there peace and justice in thy reign
Throughout the kingdom wisely governéd.
Thus free to deeds of mercy didst thou seek

Mephibosheth the son of Jonathan,
Lamed in his youth, and for his father's sake
Didst keep him as a son within thy house
And succor Ziba of the men of Saul.

David. Is there yet more? Behold thy chronicle
Is long enough to weary.

Jehoshaphat. O my lord,
Thy deeds are many. I but name the chief.

David. Then is it greater weariness to hear
All I have done than do the task of kings.

Jehoshaphat. But little now remaineth. Here I read
Of Hanun's scorn unto thy servants, sent
To keep the favor his loved father gave,
Cutting their skirts about them and their beards
Half shaving, as they had been spies abroad;
Whence came the wars which valorous Joab made,
By Abishai upheld, against the sons
Of Ammon and the Syrians arrayed
By yet undaunted Hadadezer bold
In Shobach's trusted captaincy to dare
Thy host again, which rash defiance drew
Thee like a whirlwind on them, smiting down
Their chieftain and his thousands utterly;
Which being done, thou hast to Joab left
The remnant of those Ammonites who still
Lurk in the walls of Rabbah but a space
Ere thou dost cut them root and branch away.

David. Ah, hast thou ended? I have heeded not
Thy records since the thought of Jonathan
Led off my heart from battles. What is worth
The score of all my triumphs when my soul
Hath its great joy cut off, its second self
Forever parted? Take away these scrolls

Which tell me but of vanities and leave
My heart to its rebellion. Wherefore comes
So hard a portion to it? Wherefore flies
An evil angel after me to tear,
With bloody hands, my love from its delight,
Giving my foes a sword to take the life
Of Saul, anointed by the Lord my king,
And slay his son, my best beloved friend,
Despite my strife to stay the bitterness
Of so unsought a triumph and a crown?
Whence the decree that I should have to wife,
In all the pure exalted hope of youth,
A noble maiden, daughter of a king,
And see her, in his wrath, so quickly given
Unto another's bed and, rescued thence,
Should find that bitterness and jealousy
Had turned her heart to stone that she should scorn
In tortured pride my dignity and joy?
Why are these long-contending hands so stained
By slaughter that they may not dare to raise
The temple of my thought? My love and faith,
Both marred in their endeavor, cry aloud
For consolation. Vainly do I seek,
In converse with my jealous Abigail,
With Maacah, or other wives I have
By custom of the mighty, all the balm
Such inner torment needs. Each soft caress
Of bygone days is lukewarm or the spell
Of heathen gods, the sense of conquest's rule,
The lack of understanding to partake
In kindred portion of my higher joys
Makes thorny compensation to my soul
When it doth plead responsive tenderness.

E'en thou, my harp, the measure and delight
Of my true being, dost at times evade
My searching touch for that communion sweet
Which, since my songs of youth amid the flock,
Hath given life its worth. About me broods
Some hidden evil when thy voice is dumb.
Perchance the twilight air will cool my brow,
Or, from this portico of my retreat
Upon the house top, may the evening peace
Of hills encompassing Jerusalem's throne
Subdue my cares, my troubled mind console.

[The King riseth from his couch and goeth out upon a portico. He standeth awhile gazing beyond. Then looking upon the city below, he is suddenly disturbed in spirit. At length he turneth back to the Chronicler who hath been putting up his scrolls.]

Jehoshaphat, come hither. Who abides
In yonder house where now a handmaid shuts
The lattices?

Jehoshaphat. The humble dwelling there?
Ah, that, my lord the king, is e'en the house
Of one of little wealth but wise repute—
Eliam, whose fair daughter is the wife
Of valorous Uriah, captain now
In Joab's host besieging Rabbah's walls.

David. I know Uriah's valor. Sayest thou
The woman is of favored countenance?

Jehoshaphat. She is most fair and, further saith report
That, motherless in youth, she early knew
Her father's fond instruction and is wise
'Mid Israel's daughters and of earnest heart.

David. Uriah hath whereof to make him great.
What is her name?

Jehoshaphat. Bathsheba, noble king.

David. God speed thee, good recorder, may thy pen
Have greater triumphs yet, in coming days,
For Israel's glory when we meet again.

[*Jehoshaphat goeth out.*]

Bathsheba is she named. How passing fair
Was that brief vision which I late beheld.
No woman, verily, of Israel's tribes
Hath such ripe gifts of beauty and of grace
As this young wife. Can there be loveliness
Surpassing hers as, parted from the folds
Of all her raiment, she a moment stood
Bathing her ivory limbs in thoughtful mood,
Half absent and half wistful of her charm—
The bloom of passion added, in love's pride
Of early conquest, to the gracious mould
Of nature's skill when naught her art disturbs?
A shape so beautiful hath little need
Of comely face to vanquish man's desire,
But this Bathsheba, when she raised her head
To gaze a moment at the fading west,
Unveiled from her black locks a countenance
Of such a perfectness that one forgot
The bosom's wealth beneath. Then suddenly
A handmaid closed the lattice and the world
Had nothing left that I would gaze upon.
And can sweet wisdom dwell in form so fair?
Or is report as ever adding gifts
To those whose sheaves abound, while it despoils
The little that afflicted men possess?
If it be true, such twofold comeliness

Of face and mind as this Bathsheba hath
Would cheer my spirit and exalt my zeal.
Aye, I must see her. Israel's king doth owe
A royal tribute to the worthiness
Of one so truly of Rebekah's line
And so extolled in all her neighborhood,
Nor shall another sun forsake the west
Ere I behold this wondrous evening star
Which makes the sun forgotten, ere I gaze
Upon thee, fair Bathsheba, face to face.
Yet how shall this be compassed? Foolish brain,
How dost thou fret my patience and my peace;
Know I am Israel's king, and thou my hand
Take better courage on this waiting scroll
To serve my purpose and acquaint thyself
With some device to give me joy again.

[*After meditation writeth.*]

"Bathsheba, matron of Israel, the wife
Of valiant Uriah.

There hath come
A messenger in haste from Joab's camp
And thou art bidden to come privily
To this my royal palace.

David, King."

Ho! steward, let my messenger appear.

[*A Messenger entereth.*]

Dost know Eliam's house, a little hence?

Messenger. I do, my lord the king.

David.

He hath with him

His child Bathsheba, now Uriah's wife.

Await her going forth to-morrow morn,

Give her this scroll apart and then attend
To guide her hither.

Messenger. As the king hath said
His servant doeth.

[*Goeth out.*]

David. Now, impatient eyes,
Prepare your curtains for the deepening night
And deign not to accept of other joy
Until Bathsheba is before you led;
Prepare for sleep and, when its spell descends,
If, haply, dreams reveal her beauteous face,
Ye shall not fear awaking, for at last
The living form shall fancy's craft defy.

PLACE II. A street in Jerusalem the next morning. Nathan entereth.

Nathan. Praise thou the Lord, my soul, that after
years
Of wandering and woe, the holy ark,
Whereon His spirit dwells, hath found its rest
Upon the hill of fair Jerusalem,
The King of Kings establishing His throne
In Israel's heart to sanctify the earth.
Let Zion from her towers sing for joy
And glad Moriah its thanksgiving raise,
Let Judah's voice shout back to Lebanon
And every tribe of Abram's seed rejoice,
From Jordan's valley to the greater sea.
Exalt the Lord, my soul, that thou hast seen,
After a stay of twenty humbled years, -
The ark of Moses by King David brought
From Kirjath-jearim to ever end
Its pilgrimage, and tabernacle find
On hallowed ground where David's faithful arm,

Blessed of the Lord, shall guard it from the rage
Of heathen foes and overthrow their hosts,
His kingdom fixed in Zion evermore.
How joyful is my heart as I descend
From service at the morning offering
Before the curtained tent by David set
To screen the holy ark until the Lord
Permit the temple which his heart would raise.
Why doth the Lord deny His servant grace
To do this righteous thing? In vain I strive
To see the judgment that withholds the hand
Of Israel's king from consecrated toil
In building Him an house wherein to dwell.
The Lord's all-seeing wisdom knoweth best,
Seek thy abode and question not His will.

[*Bathsheba and a Servant of David enter beyond.*]

But who are these which talk a little hence?
The man is surely one of David's house
And, if my vision doth not sadly fail,
The woman is Bathsheba by her walk
As she consents to go apart with him.
What cometh here to pass? She reads a scroll.

[*Bathsheba and Servant go forth.*]

And now together do I see them glide,
With screening raiment, to the way beyond
Which ends but at the palace of the king.
Alas! What dread foreboding seizeth me?
My limbs do tremble so that now in vain
I seek to follow after them. The Lord
Grant in His mercy that my eyes did err
In their dread witness, or, if this, indeed,
Was fair Bathsheba, that no evil fall

Upon her or bring David's soul to shame.
 Return, unhappy Nathan, to thy house
 And keep thy peace until a Higher Voice
 Doth council thee. The Lord is very wise ✓
 Beyond the feeble finding out of men.

PLACE III. The Palace of David.

David. At length my morning labor is at end
 And restless watches of the night forgot
 In expectation's promise. Never yet
 In tarrying for the battle's fitting hour
 Amid the witless clamor of a camp,
 Hath eagerness so striven with delay.
 But hark! Approaching footsteps catch my ear.
 Behold my messenger and at his side
 Bathsheba cometh.

[Bathsheba entereth with a Messenger.]

Messenger. Gracious king, behold
 Thy mission done and here Uriah's wife
 Awaits thy royal bidding.

[Messenger goeth out.]

David. If the wife
 Of one Uriah, loose thy veil and speak,
 If so thou wouldst, ere I do talk with thee
 Of things of weighty import.

Bathsheba. O my lord,
 Great king of Israel, let thy servant ask
 What tidings hast thou heard of Joab's host,
 That thus thine handmaid is before thee led?
 If I be not too bold, I do entreat
 My lord the king to tell me speedily
 The worst that may befallen. It is said

Uriah liveth not? Or else, perchance,
That he is sorely smitten? Let the king
Hide nothing from me.

David. Woman, do not fear
Or let such tender eyes beget sad tears.
Uriah hath no hurt whereof to weep.

Bathsheba. Then why, O king, is this thy servant
called
To stand before thee?

David. Good Bathsheba, know
— That other harm may come than any ill
Of flesh.

Bathsheba. What meanest thou, my lord the king?

David. A fretting spirit, cunning to devise
Evil against its rulers and stir up
Unseemly strife; such spirit is abroad
In Joab's host contending with my law
And bringing shame upon me in the camp,
Whereof are certain captains whom I hold
In much distrust concerning this reproach.
What council hath Uriah? Dost thou know
The secrets of his going?

Bathsheba. Let the king
Be of good courage for, though there be lack
Since many days of tidings from my lord,
The king may surely in Uriah trust.

David. Dost thou say truly that, since many days,
Thou hast no tidings? Hast thou then no fear?

Bathsheba. I fear not, for I know my lord is wont
To think but of his duty, and the war
Robs me of love that he may honor thee.

David. Nay, fair Bathsheba, out of thine own mouth
Doth witness come against him. If he fail

In much communication of his heart
To keep so fruitful and so rich a vine
Close clinging to his life, how may his king
Now take assurance of his faithfulness?

Bathsheba. The king is gracious.

David. Nay, I cannot be
For thy fair presence graciousness subdues
And leaves me homage only. Verily,
Not since the day when my triumphant eyes,
Viewing the singers of lamented Saul,
First noted woman's comeliness, have they known
So bright a vision.

Bathsheba. O!—My lord the king
Is surely blind and in his words misled.

David. Rather have I been blind until to-day
And erring in past praise, for never yet
Hath countenance so lovely led away
Distrust from its due vigilance, or mind
Of woman reigned in such sweet dignity
As all distrust to banish; yet perchance,
Since my brief life hath been so compasséd
With perils and betrayals and its blooms
Of joyful trust so withered, I, in truth,
May err in this brief judgment and in thee
See one whose hidden heart may be in league
With that deceitful spirit of the camp,
Feigning strange ignorance of what thy lord
Doth plot or purpose to beguile thy king
Until the blow hath fallen; one who shares
With this unloving Hittite, alien hopes
To those of Israel's chosen heritage
And Zion's true defenders. Canst thou swear,
Bathsheba, thou art faithful to my reign?

Bathsheba. As the king liveth, so my loyal heart
Doth daily pray that thou, my lord the king,
Mayest each year lead the hosts of Israel forth
To greater victories over heathen foes;
That Israel's daughters in thy strength may find
Their fortress and their song; that Israel's age
May banish sorrow in beholding thee,
And that proud Israel's children may partake
To latest manhood this rich heritage—
King David's self undying as his fame.

David. My royal blessing on thy noble soul
For its sweet comfort. Thou art one indeed
Of Abram's daughters.

Bathsheba. How can such as I,
A flower in Zion's wall, add my perfume
To the rich spices of a nation's praise?

David. A nation's incense, sweet as it hath been,
Is bought and kindled by the fickle will
And trust of men, but such a flower as this,
With its free, fragrant offering to its king,
Is precious above spices and should bloom
Not in the wall, but in the fairest court
Of Israel's palace. Nay Bathsheba, hear,
I said not mine, but Israel's.

Bathsheba. Doth the king
Forget that to Uriah first is due
My loyalty of heart?

David. Nay, fairer pearl
Than all in this rich crown, aye, fairer crown
Upon a Hittite's brow than aught I wear,
Thou art Uriah's, and by thee he reigns,
While yet my subject, more supremely king.
But, by thy word, this higher dignity

Is most unjustly borne; I trust no more,
Than if he made my rule an open scorn,
A soldier in my host who puts away
From his heart's throne and daily reverence
A queen so altogether beautiful.
And canst thou truly, fair Bathsheba, owe
Thy faith to one who, in the tender morn
Of love's sweet life, forgets its rare delight,
Or fails to mend persistent, day by day,
His household web, by absence rudely torn,
With fine, far-reaching threads of tender words?
Canst thou bestow such love as, in thy youth,
Was dreamt of for this long and dumb neglect?
Is such a tribute as thy bosom holds
Deserved in truth by alien blood so cold,
When thine own king doth languish for its joy —
For all that heart taught, as was his, to love
True Israel's greatness, beating with his own
In zeal for Israel's glory and, if joined
To his, sufficient to that glory gain?

Bathsheba. My lord the king thou dost bewilder me,
Unhappy truly, in deserted pain.

David. Be loyal then, Bathsheba, to thy king
And put thy pain away, remembering
That thou dost govern David's happiness;
Then shall his pride two mighty realms possess
And his high love be henceforth ruled by thee.
He swears it, fair Bathsheba.

Bathsheba. Doth my king
Forget his wives who nigh these very walls
Have vantage ground in contest for his heart
And speedily may turn its brief desire
From one too needful of its tenderness
To think of outcast wretchedness to come?

David. Yea, I forget them, I forget the joy
Of all I ever loved before thy face
And in thy nature's sweet supremacy.
O loveliest rose of Israel, grant my prayer.
See! David kneels to raise the fallen gates
Of thy dark eyes, that but one messenger
Of yielding love, one joy begotten tear,
May prove that thou art loyal to thy king
In all thy beauty, as in all thy soul.

Bathsheba. Stay, O my king, some all unconscious
spell

Of these sad eyes hath maddened thee. Delay
But one day yet for judgment and control
Of this wild passion, which doth terrify
My inmost soul by all its suddenness —
By all its chance of woe. Delay a while,
Ere all the power of thy royal tongue
Loose honor's clinging raiment and expose
My trembling form to thy compelling eyes,
Breaking, perchance too late to spare my shame,
The charm my face hath worked to its despair —
If thou dost lure me but to cast away.

David. Nay, beautiful Bathsheba, not alone
Thy face hath vanquished me and not to-day
Was all thy thralldom won.

Bathsheba. What meanest thou?

David. Gladly I tell thee. Yesterday at eve
I knew thee first when, looking wistfully
Beyond my palace parapet, I saw—
A radiant vision and with ravished eyes—
Thy form in its enchantment, unprofaned
By jealous raiment, whiter than a dove

Among the olives, tender as a star
At eventide, in every grace complete,
And when the lattice closed my heart was faint
With love of thee, Bathsheba, and the hours
Were hateful until I could see again
Thy beauty and beseech its treasured bliss.
Forgive my heart's device. Forget thy king
Save as thy lover—loving not alone
Thy face, but that within thee which confirms
All good reports which thronged upon mine ear—
And yet were lacking. Let thy flush of shame,
Transformed to love, assure the happy gift
That vision made me and thy heart be mine.
Thou yieldest, my delight, my own white roe,
My pearl of Israel's daughters. This, indeed,
Is loyalty to David. Let his kiss
Be on thy lips the royal seal of joy.

PART III.

OVER A MONTH HATH GONE BY.

PLACE I. A room in the King's Palace. David walketh to and fro.

David. How vain a thing is any might of man
To bind and hold his dearest pleasure long;
Night robs the victor of his flying foe
After a day of strife. Age cools the blood
When man hath but the art of living found
In temperate joy. The chill of winter sweeps
Upon the husbandman when fruitful land
Begins to yield full bounty to his toil.
And love, though bidden by a kingly will,
Hath no respect withal. I make decrees
That bear upon my people heavily
To meet the greed of wars and I affix
Upon the scroll this thin and brittle seal,
Which yet doth guard my will throughout the course
Of weary years unbroken, but when these
My passionate lips do set the seal of love
Upon my heart's decree that, out of all
The fair assembly of great Israel,
One sad, forsaken woman may be mine,
The seal is broken. In a little month,
Trouble doth come to taunt my royalty
And tear the cherished secret from my breast,
Or bring the one I love to open shame.
O woe be on the witless messenger

That, with the waning of another moon
Since last I saw Bathsheba—a delay
Of grievous yearning for her fond embrace,
Of troubled doubt, of hope with dimming eyes,
Should bring to me these tidings of dismay.
For she hath sent saying “I am with child.”
Love hath been fruitful verily, and soon,
But such full fruit without the unclouded sun
Of honor’s light upon it, doth not come
To sweet and ruddy ripeness, but must bear
A bitterness until its final fall.
Yet shall the secret rest where it hath birth,
For when, obedient to my will supreme
But yesterday by swiftest horse conveyed,
Joab doth send Uriah from the toil
Of Rabbah’s siege to sweet Jerusalem
And glad repose on fair Bathsheba’s breast,
Then may I also sleep without a care —
Saving the jealous pang which I, the king,
Must yield this Hittite captain loathfully,
Letting my envy vainly strive with fear
And portioned love a base contentment breed.

[*A Servant entereth.*]

Servant. My lord the king, a captain of the host
Of Joab waits without. What is thy will?

David. Conduct him hither. Now my soul forget
Contempt of thy poor self in will to gain
A sure escape by this compelled device.

[*Uriah entereth led by Servants.*]

David. My greeting, brave Uriah, thou art come
With loyal speed to fair Jerusalem,

Content, perchance, to at my bidding gain
A rest from warfare?

Uriah. Nay, my lord the king
To whom I owe all reverence, I was loath
To leave the camp when all who bear thy spears
Await the instant combat, but I heard
At eventide from Joab thy command
And, parting from the host at early dawn,
My good horse brought me hither. Here am I
To serve thee, whatsoever be thy will.

David. I ask no service, ere thou seekest rest,
Beyond brief tidings of the weary siege.
How doth my nephew Joab? Is it well
That thus his skill is profitless?

Uriah. My lord
And royal master, there is naught to wish
For Joab's health or subtle craft in war
Or will to serve thee, but his task is hard,
For proud King Hanun hath a strong defense
And much provision. Not alone the walls
Of Rabbah and her ditches wide and deep
Defy our strength, but, were the city won,
There still remains the lofty citadel
To give attack despite, from whence the foe
Might make our battle vain and smile in scorn
Yet many days upon us.

David. Hast not thou
Devised some way to humble Rabbah's king?

Uriah. Thy servant bows to Joab's greater skill.

David. Proud Ammonites, the evil day shall come
When I will smite ye utterly and loose
The fury of my wrath upon your heads.
Accurséd brood, in vain may women mourn

When I go down to battle. I will hale
Your haughty ones before me and their flesh
The harrow and the saw shall tear away,
The axe shall slaughter and the flame consume
Until your name shall vanish from the earth.
So be it unto me, if this my word
Is not fulfilled upon them. Tell me yet
Of Joab's host. How fares Jashobeam,
That mighty captain whose avenging spear
Three hundred slew, and Eleazar brave
Who with me in the barley field withstood
The Philistines' attack at Pas-dammim,
And valiant Abishai, one in might
With strong Jashobeam, and, in his skill,
The strength of Joab—both my sister's sons—
But Abishai most faithful? He it was
Who brought me water once from Bethlehem
At jeopardy of life, with other two.
And tell me yet, Uriah—but in vain
I ask for all to whom my heart doth cleave
Among my thirty captains or among
The thousands whom they gather to the war.
Assure me only that of those I love
No soul hath fallen in these latter days.

Uriah. None, O my king, who stands pre-eminent
Hath had the joy of yielding life for thee,
But all, impatient, wait upon the breach
Of Rabbah's walls to shed their stagnant blood
In deeds of greater valor than the past.

David. Enough, my worthy captain, for to-night.
Thou must be weary of thy journey long
And of the stern endurance of the camp.
Thou hast a spouse, if I may trust report.

Haste to her arms that her long watching yield
To sudden joy and fondest love renewed.
I would not longer keep thy eager heart
From its due pleasure. Hie thee to thy house
And wash thy feet after long journeying,
And warm thee by the fire and at the side
Of her thou lovest. Peace be with thee there.

[*To Servant.*] Lead thou this chieftain to the palace
gate

And bid Benaiah, captain of my guard,
To give him honor in attendance due
While he abideth in Jerusalem.

[*Uriah boweth the knee and goeth out with a
Servant. David, after a space, saith to
another servant—*

Seek thou my steward. Bid him come to me.

[*Servant goeth out.*

Perchance within Eliam's poor abode
They lack whereof to give befitting cheer
To this its unawaited Hittite son
Who, hungering, may have but little will
For other joy than slumber. Soft desire
Waits on indulgence of gross appetite,
Wherefore, that every goad may be supplied,
I will despatch a fitting nourishment
And gain the favor of the house withal.

[*A Steward entereth.*]

Uriah, valiant captain of the host
Of Joab, hath to-night come from the camp
And goeth unawaited to his house.
I pray thee choose from out my evening feast
A dish of meat, well spiced and savory,

The best which thou preparest for my board,
And tarry not to send it after him
To where Eliam dwelleth. Do not fail.

PLACE II. An open court of David's Palace, with plants and flowers. Abigail, Maacah and Handmaid.

Maacah. Good woman, whence hath my sweet Tamar
gone?

Handmaid. I left her, gracious mistress, in the shade
Of goodly cedar trees without the court
And, as she willed to walk awhile alone
Amid the garden by the lily beds
To pluck of them and of the fragrant myrrh
And gather pomegranates for a gift
To certain poor who sit about the gate,
I came to do thy service.

Maacah. Hast thou seen
My comely Absalom?

Handmaid. Not since the morn
When he went from the palace.

Maacah. Go thy way
And presently return again to me.

[*The Handmaid goeth out.*]

Thus is it that my beauteous Absalom,
Since he of late a joyful sojourn made
With my fond father Talmai, seeks release
From all restraint and order of the house,
And scarce know I what may be done to stay
His restless spirit in maturing years,
Ambitious now and proud beyond control.
What dost thou counsel, gentle Abigail?

Abigail. When Chileab, my princely son, doth fret
At household quiet, I do counsel him

To seek the mount beyond and try his skill
Amid the soldiers of the royal camp ;
In casting the light javelin, or else,
Mindful of his great father's youthful fame,
At practice with the sling, which exercise
Doth teach a useful cunning to his hand
Or, when he fails, doth mend his haughtiness ;
Yet I am lonely in his absence long
And, since the king hath kept so much apart,
I envy thee, gay Maacah, thy joy
In having, ever faithful at thy side,
A daughter such as Tamar, gentle-eyed
And with a heart in love forever new,
Seeking kind services in very zeal
To comfort all about her guileless life ;
A maiden of such goodness, Tamar seems
Unfitted for this low and bitter world
Of treacherous device and foul desire
Beyond the patience of a soul less pure.
Aye, once again, I envy thee the love
Of this fair daughter ever at thy call,
For thus thou mayest not feel the double pain
Of solitary hours such as mine.
Fain would I be the cherished only spouse
Of any humble man too rich in love
And poor in purse to seek another's breast,
For since the mighty measure but by gold
The number of their wives and concubines,
What joy hath any woman to partake,
After a day, a week, a moon of bliss,
Her portion of a weary king's caress,
Despite all mocking gems and rich attire
And every good but what the heart doth need.

Maacah. What aileth David, thinkest thou? His eye
Doth truly give our charms but light esteem
Since e'en a moon gone by.

Abigail. Perchance he grieves
At Rabbah's long defiance.

Maacah. Yet I count
Full many days of siege ere it befell
His mighty spirit thus to turn away
From love's sweet comfort and a father's joys.
No little time ago he banished care
And weariness of rule in light discourse
With Absalom and Tamar, making mirth
Of his rash pride and of her artless trust,
Yet mingling tender counsel with his words;
But now my son and daughter ask in vain
For their great father's sweet companionship.
His heart is heavy with some hidden care.

Abigail. 'Tis said Uriah, captain of the host
Of Joab, came at even from the camp.
Perchance his tidings may lift up again
The king's sad spirit and return to us
His radiant eyes, his words of tenderness.

Maacah. Nay, Abigail, it is not on the chance
Of Rabbah's siege that David's spirit waits.
Some woman's smile hath won him for a time,
As oft before, from our too vain caress.
Take heart, thou surely shouldst not be sore
At some new greed of this our lord's desire.
Remember, since he took me as a spoil
Of war, to, with Ahinoam and thee,
Enjoy his favor, there hath Haggith been,
And Abital, and Eglah, nor a lack
Of other wives out of Jerusalem,

And concubines besides, to stir our hate.
The fickle king will yet return to beg
Our hearts when he doth tire once again
Of this, some new conceit of idle days.

Abigail. Would it were so, that he might pay his
vows

Of love once more as in the early time,
But this hath perished for us utterly.

Maacah. Aye, verily as hot youth perisheth,
Nor may we mourn our lot, good Abigail,
For these same fleeting years will quell the lust
Of David's spirit and give temperance
In such wise measure that he will forsake
The arms of younger women to restore
His heart to thee, so early in its trust,
And me, the mother of his Absalom.

Abigail. By this thy reasoning, Ahinoam
And Michal should have precedence of me.

Maacah. Nay, Michal's angry pride and bitter tongue,
In jealousy perchance of all the wives
That David since hath taken to his heart,
Have made her an abhorrence to the king,
And she of Jezreel thou needst not fear,
Save as the mother of his lawful heir—
That subtle Amnon whom my heart mistrusts.
I fear her not, nor shall I vex myself
That David keeps aloof. I thank the gods
Of mine own land that I am not so weak
As thus to make our roving lover vain.
One good ensueth from this new neglect,
That it hath joined us in a common cause
And made me better know thee, Abigail;
For, ere this temper overcame our lord,

I was so envious of thy early right
To royal favor that my soul was blind
To all thy wisdom, grace and gentleness,
Which now I cherish with a sister's care.

Abigail. Nor less thy cheerful mind doth ease the
load
Of my heart's burden, Maacah, and raise
My fainting hope to better life again.

[*They embrace.*]

PLACE III. A room in the King's Palace. David entereth with Attendants, at the coming of darkness.

Servant. My lord the king, thy steward is at hand
And fain would speak with thee.

David. Bid him come in.

[*Steward entereth.*]

What wouldst thou, steward?

Steward. May it please the king
As thou didst bid thy servant, so I sent
At even, to Eliam's house below,
A savory mess of meat for him they call
Uriah, captain in thine host, but none
Knew of his coming or had seen his face.

David. What meaneth this?

Servant. Uriah went not out
At eventide beyond the palace gate,
But tarried with thy servants at the door,
Nor went down to his house, and, when at night
The watch was set, he wrapped him in his cloak
And lying down, as he were at the camp,
With but a shield to rest his head upon,
He slept amid thy men until the dawn.

David. And now where is he?

Servant. Still amid thy guard.

And waiting at the door to know thy will.

David. Let him be called before me.

Servant. I obey.

[*Servant goeth out.*]

David. Retire all. I would speak privily.

[*Uriah entereth led by a Servant. Servants go forth.*]

Good morrow, stern Uriah, what is this
My household have but told me? Camest thou
Not from thy journey? Why then didst thou not
Go to thy dwelling, rather than forsake
The comfort of thy house for such cold rest
As only those in Joab's camp endure?
Didst thou indeed sleep at the palace door?

Uriah. I did, my lord the king.

David. And wherefore thus,

In such rude slumber under no command,
Give up thine ease, the welcome of thy house,
And put its fond and anxious hearts to shame?
Why shun the long embrace of thy young wife
Who doth not lack, if what is said be true,
In comeliness, and whose unhappy sighs
Thy throbbing heart should hasten hence to quell,
Ere all the city mock at thy delay?

Uriah. My lord the king, there is not of thine host
One who, before thy servant, seeks to guard
More faithfully thy statutes or perform
With all his heart the pleasure of thy will—
Who serves thee with more reverence and love
For all thy wisdom, for thy uprightness
Before the Lord, to Whom alike we bow;

And, seeing that the God of all our strength
Hath called thee and anointed thee the king
Of all His chosen seed, my soul doth joy
In serving Him when I obey thy word,
And serving thee when Him I magnify ;
But, whilst the heathen yet do vainly stand
To mock His glory and defy thy power,
My soul would put all lesser joy aside
For Zion's banner, and remember not
The happy rule my little kingdom craves
In zealous service of thy hallowed throne.
Behold the ark whereon Jehovah dwells
Between the cherubim, it yet abides,
As on its desert pilgrimage of old,
Within a curtained tent, its lowly place,
Until thy sword hath smitten all its foes.
In tents, moreover, wait the faithful hosts
Of Israel and Judah and the chief
Of thousands, lordly Joab and his trust,
Full many mighty captains, scorning ease
Or dainty living while a foe defies,
And that beloved band I lead to war
Who take example of the toil I bear ;
All these are on the open field encamped,
Counting their hardship light for Israel's sake.
And shall I then go down into my house
To play the glutton and be drunk with wine
And dally with my wife in slothful lust,
As void of understanding and of shame
To leave my post forsaken at the front
Of honor? As thou livest, O my king,
As thy soul lives, I will not do this thing.
Let me, I pray thee, hasten to the camp

That I may share the battle we attend
And leave all other joy to days of peace
When Rabbah's walls have fallen.

David.

Tarry here

But this day also and, to-morrow morn,
I promise thee that I will let thee go.
So eat now with me, for I would inquire
Of more that appertaineth to the siege,
For which I have not sooner summoned thee
Lest I might mar the gladness of thy house
And drag thee, loathful, from thy wife's embrace,
Which seemeth, verily, a needless care.
Ho, servant.

[*A Servant entereth.*]

Take my captain in thy charge
A moment, that he lay his armor by
And fit himself to share my meat with me.
Bid ye my steward that he here may spread
Our table, failing not to prove his skill
And sending us of Zabdi's choicest wine.
And make excuse to good Mephibosheth
And others of my banquet hall to-night,
That I would with Uriah talk alone.

[*Uriah and the Servant go forth.*]

Did ever virtue climb so mad a height?
Or hath Uriah knowledge of my sin
That, with so rich a prize for long desire,
He shunneth her whose faith I have betrayed
And doth, with such a wily argument,
Thus pierce my spirit through as with a sword?
He taunteth me that I do dwell in ease
Amid the riches of my royal house
Erewhile the ark and Israel's captains all

Abide in tents, as waiting on the Lord.
Aye, surely he reproacheth me, his king.
Yet, if it be so, he dissembleth
With art so rare, my soul abaséd bows
Before the image of such holy zeal,
Integrity so pure and undefiled.
O, could I flee the snare wherein I lie,
My soul would prove Uriah. If, indeed,
His heart were single in its uprightness,
This captain should stand first below my throne
And fill the void which Jonathan hath left,
My heart atoning thus its evil deed.
An hour yet remaineth, if therein,
With dainty meats and lust provoking wine,
I stir desire in Uriah's heart
And send him yet to fair Bathsheba's bed,
My shame will hide itself and human eyes
Will never know my honor's emptiness.
But, if I cannot bend this higher will,
Flee thou, my soul, before my dark despair.

[A Steward and Attendants fetch a table bountifully spread. Then Uriah entereth with Servant.

The Steward and Servants go without.

My valiant captain, welcome to my board.
I drink thy welfare in my choicest wine.

Uriah. My lord the king, I thank thee. May my life
End when I cease thy righteous rule to serve.

David. Let this dish tempt a warrior's appetite
And, if its savor please thee, raise thy cup
That we may drink to Joab. Nay again,
Or I will think thou dost belie his skill.

Uriah. Save thee, O king, I count him as the first,
Since Abner's death in leading hosts to war,

In cunning to array his diverse force
And judgment when and where to smite the foe.

David. And thinkest thou he cleaveth to his king
With fitting love and fear and willet not
To set himself in some unlawful place?

Uriah. I think he feareth thee, but who can read
The heart of man to know if love abides
Behind his service or unwonton grace?
Yet could I swear to Joab's faithfulness.

David. And my brave captains?

Uriah. They do wait on thee
As do thy fingers on the valiant arm
That slew the hungry lion and the bear
When thou didst tend the flock.

David. A brimming cup
To these my mighty men. Aye, drink again.

Uriah. My heart is nothing loath to such as these,
And in so red and excellent a wine.

David. Aye, is it not, my captain? Surely none,
I will be sworn, from Ammon's camps despoiled
Can hold compare with this from Hebron's vale.
And now partake of spiced venison
That thou mayest testify my steward's skill.
One further thing I would inquire of thee
Concerning all my thousands in the camp,
Dost thou consider they are true to me?

Uriah. Aye, as the heavy locks of tawny hair
Upon thy head, will these men cling to thee.

David. But hair doth fall with trouble or with age,
And even thus the color of their faith
May turn with some dire chance, and, in a day,
Or month, or year, their numbers may be thinned,
Leaving their king with unprotected brow

To vainly seek a shelter in distress.
Yet would I not reproach them; I do prize
Their present faith above my jeweled crown,
For it would be poor covering alone.
Drink then to these good fighting men of mine.

Uriah. Gladly, my valiant king, and let us drink
Again to that brave thousand whom I lead.

David. With all my heart, *Uriah.* Let me fill
Thy golden cup twice over for the thought.
A captain's band are as his children dear.
And now enough of war.

Uriah. Nay, goodly king,
I do not weary of it. There, in truth,
My children are and I do hasten back
To-morrow gladly, to partake their toil.

David. Then, if thou wilt, to-morrow, but thy heart
Should not forget its happy bondage here.

Uriah. They are my children verily. Thy speech,
Good David, is most just.

David. Then drink again
To thy secure return. But tell me yet
I pray thee, of thy wife, how is she called?

Uriah. Of my wife, sayest thou, my valiant king?

David. Aye, of thy wife.

Uriah. Bathsheba is my wife.
Who sayeth she is not?

David. Thou dost not heed.
Is then Bathsheba comely?

Uriah. Aye, my lord,
Bathsheba is most fair, a chosen lamb
That I do cherish well in peaceful days.

David. And why not now, *Uriah?* Let us drink
A cup well filled to that fair wife of thine,

Thus doing honor to this set of gold
Which Toi, king of Hamath, gave to me.
And take again of meat, a mountain hart,
One of a herd from Lebanon's cool heights
Which came to me from Hiram, Tyre's king.
Then drink we now to fair Bathsheba's joy.
Thou sighest, brave Uriah. Why should now
Thy spirit fall? Is all not well with thee?

Uriah. Those peaceful days will come and love
withal.

David. Love waiteth thee, why turn thy soul away
From present joy? Hast thou no yearning sweet
For this young wife's embrace so long deferred,
For each beguiling art by which she drew,
In bygone days, the net of love so close
About thy willing mind? Dost thou not see
Eyes dark and soft as Bethlehem's clear well
Which seem to overflow in tender plea
For thee to draw of love and slack thy thirst
In its abundance? Do no tender lips
Gather the red of poppies for their bloom
Beneath thy kisses, and as softly give
Their loving answer as the orange tree
Floating its blossoms on the evening wind?
And her white bosom, wilt thou leave it cold
As ripened fruit beneath a midnight moon,
Nor turn to taste a bounty all thine own?
Uriah, thou hast now thy king's release
From every weary service of the war.
Thy honor hath no bond. Thy heart is free
To follow its desire. Get thee down
To take delight in thy Bathsheba's love,
In thine own house and thy well won repose,

And I, thy king, will multiply thy wealth
And ever suit my favor to thy joy.

Uriah. The king is gracious. Let us talk of this
After the fall of Rabbah.

David. Nay, but now.

Uriah. Thou knowest I must start at early dawn
For Joab's camp. Can I no message bear?
Yet, write it, O my king, for these thy cups
Have made my head unfit for any trust.

David. And wilt thou not, on this last night go down
To thine own house and fair Bathsheba's bed?

Uriah. What sayest thou? Aye, she is very fair,
And when we smite these dogs of Ammonites—
Oh, we shall smite them, hip and thigh, my lord—
I bid thee come and see, and we shall drink
Again, amid thy captains, of the spoil.
But I must get me hence. 'Tis surely time
To set the night watch. One more cup to thee.
Let the king live forever. Fare thee well.

David. Farewell, Uriah, give no joy delay.
Ere I do sleep I will a parchment write
For Joab. One will give it thee at dawn.
If thou art found with purpose to depart—
Perchance a long farewell.

[*Uriah goeth out of the apartment.*

He knoweth not

How darker than the night may be his path,
How terrible its ending, if he fail
To go from hence to his own dwelling place
And witlessly Bathsheba's honor save.
Yon window overlooks the palace court.

[*Goeth to a window.*

Here will I watch to know Uriah's choice.
If he doth pass the gate, my troubled heart
Shall be delivered. If he turn again
To sleep with these my servants at the door,
But one dread act remaineth. Lo! he goes
Across the pavement with unsteady feet,
The night lamps flickering with anxious eyes
Amid the gloom above him. He doth pause.
He answereth the challenge of the watch;
And now, O woe is me, he turns within.
Rise, stricken soul, face thou this last despair,
Acquaint thyself with evil and attend
A night which this poor mortal shall not know,
Though he do pass to death. For, thrusting thee
From thy high throne in my disturbéd brain,
There sits the evil spirit which gat hold
Of Saul to his destruction when I fled
Before his wrath, as in the wilderness
The timid partridge from the hunter flies.
But then my soul was mightier than to-day,
In that I would not take fair Abigail
Until the Lord Himself had Nabal slain.
Yet shall not stern Uriah to my shame
Evade the spirit which provoketh me
To bloody doing, lest he live to see
Bathsheba great with child and drag her up
Before the judges of all Israel,
That she be stoned in all the people's sight
As it is written in the holy law.
For, should he know the thing his wife hath done,
No royal bribe his outraged soul could quell
Or shield us from his righteous enmity,
And, as betraying waves wash to and fro

The blood that stains them, so would many tongues
Cast on us both the spittle of their scorn,
And overwhelm us utterly at last.
Nay, if like Saul, I perish in my sin,
This man must die to hide her guilt and mine—
A scapegoat, though atonement never come.
Dishonored king, would that the multitude
Could cast its pitiless stones on thee alone.
But this were vain, and thou must live to save
Bathsheba from the peril thou hast wrought.
The man must die. O David, in thy heart
Thou truly hadst cause for sudden fear
When Uzzah, putting hand upon the ark,
Fell for his error, smitten of the Lord,
And thou, convicted in the Holy wrath,
Didst say "How shall the Lord's ark come to me?"
And turn it from Jerusalem aside;
Dread now, the curtained tent wherein it rests
In yonder awful gloom, refusing thee
The house these guilty hands had sought to raise;
Hide thee in trembling from its presence pure
Lest, from the glory amid the cherubim,
The lightning of the wrathful Holy One
Should slay thee in a moment and consume
Thy very ashes from the face of earth;
Shun thou the wise and good about thy throne,
Lest they reproach their king and turn aside
Making lament for Israel. But hark!

[*A trumpet sounds.*

The trumpet upon Zion's battlements
Doth sound the morning watch. I can not now
Delay in fruitless meditation more.
Uriah's will is set to hasten hence.

He never shall return. To Joab's eye
Shall this dread scroll my guilty secret take,
Smiting the hand that bears it. But my sin
Compels no less a sacrifice than blood.

[*Writeth.*

"Brave Joab, chiefest captain of my host,
This secret message is my royal will,
Whereof sufficient reason guideth me.
Set ye Uriah, who doth bear this scroll
And others for thee, in the battle's front,
The forefront of the battle's hottest rage,
And then retire ye from roundabout,
That he may there be smitten and may die.
Destroy the scroll thou readest. David, king."

[*David seals several scrolls.*

Ho! servant.

[*A Servant entereth.*]

As thou livest, do not fail
To give Uriah, captain in my host,
When at the dawn of day he setteth forth
For Joab's camp, these scrolls to bear to him.

PART IV.

PLACE I. The House of Eliam. Bathsheba seated alone.

Bathsheba. Aye, verily, doth not this last reproach
Suffice to free me from so cold a lord
And quit my heart of love, if not of fear.
Two idle days within Jerusalem
Hath stern Uriah passed, two cruel days
When every hireling did speak of him
While yet he came not down to honor me.
Two lonely nights, and now behold him fled
At cock crowing to Joab's camp again,
Without a care to leave me desolate.
Hath he indeed suspicion of my shame?
Nay, this thing cannot be or he had come
With wrath to chasten, nor could David turn
Him silent from this evil to the host.
And hath not David, since I sent him word
Of what hath fallen to me, surely brought
Uriah hither to conceal my fault,
Entreating him to come down to his house
And rest him from the weariness of wars?
No other thing than lack of love for me
Could thus have taught a froward countenance
And held Uriah from a wife's embrace.
Nor, as the days of Rabbah's strong defense
Are all unnumbered, shall I see again
With feignéd joy my lord until too late
To save my broken honor. What shall shield

My soul from its distress, if he come not?
Ah! woe is me and utterly undone,
If I be brought to judgment for my shame,
Failing to conquer nature or to keep
My bitter secret close from prying eyes.
It is but little since it seemed secure
Within my breast and all its ceaseless strife
With conscience, pride, the day's allotted toil,
A father's blind affection and the pledge
Of wedlock, as a tumult I could quell,
A pain which rarely ventured messages
From David's heart could gently soothe away.
But, now that stern Uriah brings to naught
The king's device, my brief transgression climbs
From its uncovered grave to drag me down.
Oh! for a place of refuge, a defense
From those who persecute with poisoned tongues
An erring woman to the gates of death,
Unpitied, unprotected and despised;
Rend thou thy garments, poor unhappy one,
That all the innocency of thy youth,
The wisdom of thy teaching and the grace
Of thine adornment and thine honor true
Should thus contemptuously come to shame
Before the sight of Israel. Who can save
Thy beauty now, Bathsheba? Not the king.
No taint shall come to David. Though he swear
Before the judges that his love prevailed,
I yet shall swear another ravished me
And that I know him not. Oh thou, my king,
My royal lover, mighty over all
And lovely in the riches of thy heart,

The fulness of thy grace, would thou couldst know
Henceforth Bathsheba's love is only thine,
Her bosom pillow for thy head alone,
Her spirit loyal to none else but thee,
Her beauty, at its best, a gift too small
To pledge her deep desire evermore.
Would thou couldst bend again to charm my soul
With thy sweet lips and give me of their balm
Of words so fond, of thoughts so heavenly bright
That, in their comfort and dominion strong,
I might contend with my calamity
And arm my groaning soul to meet her woes.

*PLACE II. The Camp of Israel before Rabbah. Joab, Abishai
and Soldiers hard by.*

Joab [*aside*]. This favor to Uriah bodeth ill
To my high station. Doubtless hath the king
Displeasure in my vain endeavor here
To conquer Rabbah, and deviseth means
With this shrewd Hittite to abase my head.
I needs must press the war without delay
Ere his return with some authority
I dare not question to arrest my arm.
Abishai, thinkest thou the king hath called
Uriah to our hurt?

Abishai. The thing is strange
Yet, brother, do not vex thyself thereat.
Doubtless our uncle knoweth the repute
Of this man's truth and proved integrity
And seeketh certain knowledge of the war.
It is not in Uriah's heart to turn
His voice against thee. Therefore put away
Thine idle fear and think but of the siege.

Joab. Aye, surely, it admitteth not delay.
This very morning will I make assault
To keep acquaintance with the foe's defense
And stay the murmuring within our camp,
While yet Uriah lingereth. Do thou set
Thy thousands in array. I will essay
The war of this same Hittite, as he spake
Since many days. If it beget success,
His mission will be vain or I shall win
His favor by accord with his device,
And if it fail, his be the first reproach.

Abishai. Nay, Joab, it were surely just to wait
Uriah's coming ere this thing be done,
Lest the reproach be thine.

Joab. Abishai cease,
Thou hast but to obey my fixed intent.
Do thou betake thee to the northern wall
And there dispose the engines of the siege
In semblance of attack, while I prepare
A company to burden yonder gate
With fuel for the all consuming flame
And here, with these my fighting men, await
The movement of the foe's extremity.

Abishai. But who will lead this desperate advance
To burn the gates beneath yon battlements,
Where stone and lance and burning pitch attend
To make the boldest spirit justly quail?

Joab. In truth I know not. This indeed requires
A mettle that is adverse to the will
Of all vainglorious hearts. Hast thou a man
To take such hardy leadership?

Abishai. Not I,
Nor would I ask my valiant captains' lives

For unavailing slaughter, where the foe
May scornful laugh behind their sure defense.

Joab. Perchance a measure of the finest gold
Would bribe this service.

Abishai. Nay, nor ten would buy
The man thou needest, for the task is death.
And he who faceth it without a fear
Is of a stuff no kingdom's gold may bribe
And heedeth but the soul's command within.
I know but one who so hath lifted up
His zeal above desire. Lo he comes.

Joab. Confusion! Doth Uriah come indeed
So speedily from David? Aye, 'tis he,
Now shall my pride be smitten utterly
Or sorely chastened, here before the camp,
And all its craft uncovered. Let me face
The king's displeasure as a soldier may.

[*Uriah entereth.*]

My greeting good Uriah.

Uriah. Hail to thee,
My chieftain! Hail Abishai!

Joab. What hath turned
Thy feet so soon from fair Jerusalem,
From thine own household, from my lord the king?

Uriah. My lord, I had no will to tarry thence,
Above the camp's discomfort, or renounce
My portion in the strife of Israel's host.

Joab. And didst thou then acquaint my lord the king
With thy device to enter Rabbah's walls,
And hasten hither with his favor armed?

Uriah. Nay Joab, it becometh not my tongue
To hold such council save with thee alone—

The leader of our might in open field.
These letters do I bear thee from the king,
Which I had given up at eventide
But that my horse was lamed upon the way.

Joab [aside]. Now hath mine hour come. Uriah, go
With this my brother for a cup of wine
To thy refreshment, while I read alone
In these few scrolls the pleasure of the king.

[Uriah and Abishai go forth. Joab readeth.]

"Supplies will reach the camp"—of this anon—

"Benaiah, captain of my royal guard
Hath set in goodly order certain bands"

And thus,—and thus,—"which here await thy need."
Our ranks suffice. As yet my sword is mine.

"The royal armorer doth further send
Ten thousand bucklers and a like increase
Of bows and spears to meet the waste of war."

The thing is wisely ordered. What is this?

As the Lord liveth, this is passing strange.

"The hottest battle and retire ye,
That he may there be smitten and may die."

And can it be Uriah of the host?

The writing is the king's beyond dispute.

Poor Hittite, verily I needed not

To fear thy power. Like a gourd it lies

All withered in the flame of David's ire.

Yet whence doth come this mystery of hate

Which makes my envy dumb, this bloody will

Of Israel's righteous king against the soul

I counted next in honor to his own,

In mine own secret heart? What poison lurks

With fatal strength in flowers deemed so fair?

The path is dangerous wherein I tread

And passeth comprehension. For a time
I am delivered joyful from my fears,
And naught remaineth but to gather up
This unawaited harvest, while the sun
Of royal favor on my power shines
And do this bloody deed without delay.
Now have I such a vantage of the king
In this dark secret, that the long reproach
Of Abner's blood is covered, and I hold
His honor, aye the power of his throne,
In grasp so firm that I can banish fear,
And henceforth live in proud disdain of foes.
For, verily Uriah doth not bear
The burden of iniquity alone.

[*Uriah entereth.*]

Where is Abishai?

Uriah. He hath gone in haste
To set his battle 'gainst the northern wall,
Since it appeareth thou hath made resolve
To strive again to-day for mastery.

Joab. Aye, verily, and further have I willed
To put thy skill and valor to the test—
Thy skill in that device thou spakest of,
Full many days gone by, to end the war,
Thy valor in the leadership of those
Who carry fuel forth to yonder gates
That the unsparing flames their beams consume.

Uriah. But this is rather service to allot
A captain of an hundred, since it yields
No chance of valiant strife ere death descend
From Rabbah's towers to make sacrifice
Of those who press their humble service near.

I fear not death, but fain would take its pall
In leading on my thousand through the wreck
Of burning timbers, in a swift pursuit
Of Ammonites who sally to repel
Our rude aggression, striving sword to sword,
As seemeth more the measure of my force,
With those who best withstand our bloody way.

Joab. I deemed Uriah needed but to hear
His chieftain's call for duty to obey,
And, since none other seeketh to sustain
The place of peril thou didst e'en devise,
I cannot now do battle as I would
Or either prove thy valor or thy skill.

Uriah. Enough, my chieftain, 'tis a vain conceit,
Perchance, that moves me. Thou shalt never need
To prove my valor more. Give me but time
To seek my armor and I wait the band
Thou dost appoint to carry out thy will.

Joab. Thou needst not a greater weight of brass
To hinder thee. Let what thou hast suffice.
Attend the troop that I shall send to thee
In yonder trenches. I must needs prepare
My battle, lest the foe do issue forth
From yonder gates to put thy men to flight
When I will go to aid thee and pursue
A vantage to their innermost defense.

[*Uriah and his Servants go forth by one
way and Joab by another.*]

1st Soldier. Now are we like to smite these Am-
monites

Or lend our beards, like David's messengers,
To most uncivil barbers.

2nd Soldier. What is this?
Do they, to spare their labor at one's beard,
Take off the head as well?

1st Soldier. Aye, it may be,
But dost thou fight and knowest not whereof
Thou fightest?

2nd Soldier. Even so, nor am I first
That striveth, knowing nothing of his cause.

1st Soldier. Thy wit doth serve thee better than thine
ears
Or this unstained javelin.

3rd Soldier. Nay, the lad
Will prove his courage yet upon the field.

4th Soldier. Aye, 'tis a valiant stripling, I will wage.

1st Soldier. In truth, he learneth somewhat. Let it
pass.

I will inform thee why we thus are set
At strife with Ammon. Nahash was their king,
Proving a friend to David in his need,
And Nahash died, and Hanun in his stead
Reigned over Ammon. Wherefore, David said
I will show kindness unto this the son
Of Nahash, for his father's love to me.
And David sent to comfort him, by mouth
Of certain servants, at his father's death
And when these men were come into the land
Of Ammon, Hanun in conceit of youth
Listened to princes who persuaded him
That rather did they enter to spy out
And overthrow his city, than with thought
To honor Nahash or to comfort him.
Whereat, King Hanun David's servants took

And had them shaven of but half their beards
And, to their buttocks, cut their garments off,
Sending them thus way. Which David heard
And had his people go to seek them out,
For they were greatly shamed, and bid them rest
In Jericho until their beards were grown.

2nd Soldier. And, let us trust, their garments' scanti-
ness

Was somewhat lengthened also. Verily,
The Ammonitish tailors are no more
Than these their barbers, men to be desired.

3rd Soldier. Perchance we yet shall teach them how
to use

Their shears in better fashion, else our swords
Merit no higher service in our hands.

2nd Soldier. Aye, we shall teach them. Would that
David now

Could take the razor to King Hanun's chin
And leave his princes' garments to our care,
They would be strangely altered in design.

[*Trumpet sounds.*

1st Soldier. The time for words is ended. Do ye hear
The trumpet's call to battle? Now prepare
To put young zeal to proof in valiant arms.

[*Joab and his Followers return.*

Joab. At length the stir of war again awakes
My slothful camp. Once more is life a joy
And every heart is eager as my own.
Behold how swiftly doth Uriah lead
His burdened companies to yonder gates,
Ere yet the foe hath sounded an alarm.
Ah, now ye see upon their battlements

The sons of Ammon hastening to defend.
Our troop is nearing. Yet a moment more
And it will reach its goal. Hear ye the twang
Of angry bow strings. Now, alas, men swarm
On yonder wall. Uriah surely gains
His purpose in despite of all their war.
See ye that smoke arise before the gates?
Will Hanun open now their haughty front
To save them from the fire? Aye, behold!
They turn upon their bearings. Now beware
The coming foe, my captains. See, they pour
Upon the troop and drive the remnant back.
It seemeth I can yet behold a spot
Where, steadfast as a stone amid the brook,
Uriah parts the current of our foes.
Ah, now the stream pours onward unrestrained,
The Hittite's helm hath fallen. Haste away,
My captains, that your thousands which await
This coming onset may their bucklers bear
With firmest arm and their set spears maintain
To meet and turn the shock and backward drive
These Ammonites all bleeding to their dens.

*[Captains hasten forth. Contending Men of war
appear. Confusion of attack from the enemy.]*

Stand firm, my valiant men. Let no one fear
These howling dogs. Thus let them feel our might.

[Joab fights, the enemy is dismayed.]

Their ranks are parted. Follow up your blows,
Press on my men. They flee. Now in pursuit
And let your spears drink all the blood they will.
Slay Ammon to his gates and yet beyond.

[Soldiers fighting pass beyond, pursuing their foes.]

The king did bid me, when Uriah fell,
 My soldiers to retire roundabout,
 That he be surely given up to death,
 But I am fain to let my host pursue
 The fleeing foe to Rabbah's battlements,
 That it perchance may also pass within
 And make their refuge vain. Alas, too late
 My companies those yawning gates attain,
 For now they close again in sullen strength
 And swallow up their pitiful attack
 Before our baffled spears. Ho! Bid them sound
 The trumpet to call off my thousands all.
 The rain of death from Rabbah's battlements
 Denyeth further honor to our strife,
 And leaveth but too many in their blood
 To share the lot of David's sacrifice.

[Trumpets sound.]

Yet who is this my soldiers bear to me,
 So tenderly sustaining as they move?
 'Tis e'en Uriah, stricken grievously
 But living still, whom thus their pitying hands
 Do witlessly bring hither to my shame.
 If death ensueth not from these his wounds,
 The mischief of this evil day will fall
 Upon me bitterly. Would I could flee.
 This onset is more terrible to bear
 Than all the measure of King Hanun's rage.

*[Uriah is tenderly borne in by several Soldiers
 and laid down.]*

What, can this be Uriah ye have brought?

1st Soldier. Alas, my lord, it is thy captain brave.

Joab. And is he sorely smitten?

2nd Soldier. Unto death.

1st Soldier. So we do fear, yet, finding life in him,
We could, for honor of his valiant soul,
But bring him hither with a chance to save.

Joab. Where did ye find him?

1st Soldier. Nigh to Rabbah's gates
And fifty Ammonites about him slain
Did prove how well his sword was building up
A groaning fortress of his wrathful foes
Against themselves, when some malignant shaft
From Rabbah's battlements with aim accurst
Bowed down the noblest soul of Israel's host
And brought us this calamity.

Joab. Ye loved
Uriah passing well?

2nd Soldier. He loved us,
And was a chieftain worthy to beget
A royal line to rule in righteousness.

Joab. Beware, lest in these treasonable words
Thou dost reproach King David.

1st Soldier. Hark, he speaks.

Uriah. Is it the voice of Joab?

Joab. Here am I.

Uriah. Hath Rabbah fallen?

Joab. Nay Uriah, vain
Is all the expectation of our strife.

Uriah. Ah! woe is me. Are many soldiers slain
Of Israel's camp?

Joab. Alas, too many sleep
Beyond the trump of any war again.
How is it with thee?

Uriah. Joab, I shall lead
The troop that passeth down the vale of death,

For this my wound is mortal. Bend thine ear,
That I may speak to thee for those I love.
I have a wife in Zion, excellent
In every noble virtue. Do thou say
That all the secret yearning of my heart
Awaited honor's bidding to regain
The light of her fair countenance, the bliss
Of an affection which I did not dare
To taste ere peaceful days, lest I should prove
Unworthy of my duty and my king—
Which I awaited Israel's kingdom won
To sanctify, as doth a bridegroom wait,
In chaste integrity through lingering days
Of sweet desire, for a father's hand
To render him the maiden all his own.
Bid her take comfort, as she mourns for me,
That I was smitten in the battle's front
Of Israel's war, for David and the Lord.
Have patience with me for my lips grow cold.
And do thou say for me unto the king,
Who to his servant hath been very kind,
That I have loved him faithfully and striven
With all my heart and this my alien hand,
As far as in my humble valor lay,
To serve him, and the glory of his reign.
And say that thou didst see Uriah drink
His ebbing blood as one last cup of wine,
Crying "Live David ever in the Lord."
Ah cruel death! Yet let God's will be done.
My pure dream of a righteous life is o'er.

Joab. He dieth. Surely 'tis a soldier's end.
Stay not to here lament him. Bear away
His body to a fitting burial.

And bid ye others search the bloody field
For Israel's servants fallen and the spoil
Of smitten Ammonites ere night descend.
And send ye to me, with no tarrying,
A messenger appointed to convey
These tidings to Jerusalem to the king.

[*Soldiers bear off the body of Uriah.*

Now shall I surely in King David's sight
Find favor, though the shame of this defeat
Doth vex my spirit, forasmuch as blood
Hath sealed his high displeasure and hath hid
My evil in some dark iniquity.

[*A Messenger entereth.*]

Hast thou made ready to depart in haste
With tidings for King David?

Messenger.

Aye, my lord.

Joab. I charge thee that thou tell my lord the king
Of everything concerning this our war,
Of whose device it was, of how we set
The battle in array, and of its course
On either side, and say ye unto him,
Surely the men against our force prevailed
And came out unto us into the field,
And we were then upon them to pursue
Even unto the entering of the gate,
Whereat, the bowmen of King Hanun's host
From off the wall upon thy servants shot
Such deadly arrows that advance was vain.
And when, with this, thy tongue hath made an end
Of matters of the war before the king,
If it should be so that his wrath arise
And he say of me. "Why approachéd ye

So nigh unto the city in the fight?
Knew ye not they would shoot ye from the wall?
Who smote Abimelech the cruel son
Of Jerubbesheth? Verily, did not
A woman cast a piece of millstone down
Upon him from the wall so that he died
In Thebez? Why went ye so near the wall?"
Then say thou thus—"Uriah of thine host,
The Hittite, is dead also."—This from me.

PART V.

NINE MONTHS HAVE PASSED.

*PLACE I. A room in the Palace opening upon a garden.
David and Bathsheba.*

David. How doth my heart rejoice again, my love,
That thou art from thy days of childbed free
To walk forth in our garden at my side,
Beneath the fragrant almond trees in bloom
And by the beds of spices at the springs,
Or here to sit with all thy pleasant words
To cheer my kingly labors and inspire
Unwittingly, for each petition made,
More gracious answer than my fixed intent.

Bathsheba. Ah verily, my lord, my king, my spouse,
Thy heart doth seem to dearly cherish me
Despite these nine moons since the chance of war
Removed Uriah and thy rescue came
To snatch me from destruction to the bliss
Of this high refuge, and despite release,
In this last month of childbed, from mine eyes
When thou wert free to seek another's charms.

David. Aye, as thou livest, I do love thee more,
My sweet Bathsheba, than all Israel's fair.
And, with the springtime of this happy year
Which giveth me the first fruits of thy womb,
My heart, exultant, counteth thy return
To all life's joys a blossoming again
Of love in purer and more peaceful sway.

It hath desire but for thee alone,
Delighting to behold thy beauty clad
In this thy raiment of fine needlework,
All wrought with gold and odorous of myrrh,
As doth become the queen of David's pride.
And, now that thou canst share my happy throne,
With ornaments of Ophir's finest gold
Shall I bedeck thee and appoint to serve
Thy pleasure daughters of subjected kings,
Faint stars about the fulness of the moon,
And all that seek my favor shall bring gifts
Of every precious thing throughout the earth
To thee, my best beloved, my most fair.

Bathsheba. And this sweet child which love hath given
us,

Shall he have precedence of all thy sons?

David. Such is my heart's desire, but thou dost know
That he hath not just title to my throne,
Yet if, with ripper years, thy graces fall
To his most favored heritage, he may,
In very deed, be hailed as Israel's king.
No urgent thing is this. Let us delight
In the indulgence of these balmy days
Of full prosperity and promised peace,
In riches of the house and of the heart,
Nor vainly now imagine future care.

Bathsheba. Thy words are ever wise, my royal spouse,
And, like the dew of Hermon's barren sides,
Bring consolation down in sorrow's night.
As I put out of mind the cold neglect
Of stern Uriah in his valiant end,
Which I did mourn with my forgiving tears,
So will I give the years that are to come

To faith of better things and we alike
Can deeper love in that a secret fault,
Unknown to any man, hath chastened us
And bindeth now our hearts forever one.
Kiss me again, beloved, there is none
Like unto thee, high tower of my soul,
And let thy sometimes brooding spirit hold
Its present joy to make my gladness full.

[*A Servant entereth.*]

Servant. My lord the king, there waiteth at the door
The prophet Nathan who would speak with thee.

Bathsheba. Let me go hence; my troubled memories
Would bring disquietude before his face.
I yet am all too weak to meet his eyes.

[*Bathsheba hasteneth away, but pauseth
behind a curtain.*]

David. Let Nathan come before me.

Servant. I obey.

[*Nathan entereth.*]

David. The Lord be with thee, Nathan.

Nathan. And with thee.

David. Thy visitations have been very few
These many days and burdened as with care,
And, since a month thy countenance is strange.

Nathan. I have been in communion with the Lord.

David. Doth any sorrow vex thee? Let thy tongue
Acquaint me with it and command my will.

Nathan. My lord the king, I have a weighty cause
To bring, today, before thy judgment seat.

David. The king attends. My honored Nathan,
speak.

Nathan. There were two men who in one city dwelt.
The one was rich, the other very poor.

The rich man had exceeding many flocks
And lowing herds. The poor man nothing had,
Save only one ewe lamb which he had bought
And nourishéd, and it grew up with him
And with his children, and of his own meat
Did eat and likewise drank of his own cup,
And in his bosom lay and unto him
Was as a daughter. And there came that way
A traveler to the rich man, and he spared
To take of his own flock and his own herd
To dress for that wayfaring man who came
Unto him, but he took the poor man's lamb
And slew and dressed it for the stranger's need.

David. As the Lord liveth, he that thus hath done
Shall now restore fourfold the lamb he slew,
And, for that he hath done so base a thing
And had no pity, he shall surely die.

Nathan. Thou art the man. Thus saith to thee the
Lord,
The God of Israel. "I anointed thee
King òver Israel, and from the hand
Of Saul delivered thee, and to thee gave
Thy master's house and thy proud master's wives
Into thy bosom, and I yet bestowed
The house of Judah and of Israel,
And, if this bounty had too little been,
I would, moreover, unto thee have given
The kingdoms of the heathen and the ends
Of earth for thy possession and thy seed.
Wherefore hast thou the Lord's commandment now
Despiséd, to do evil in His sight?
For thou hast killed Uriah with the sword,
The Hittite thou hast slain by Ammon's hand

And taken his wife unto thee as thine.
Therefore the sword shall never from thy house
Depart, because thou hast despised Me
And taken unto thee Uriah's wife."
Thus saith the Lord, "Behold, I will raise up
Evil against thee out of thine own house,
And I will take thy wives before thine eyes
And give them to thy neighbor. He shall lie
With thy wives in the sight of yonder sun,
For thou didst do it secretly, but I
Will do this thing before all Israel
Upon the housetop and before the sun."

David. O Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord!

Nathan. The Lord hath also put away thy sin.
Thou shalt not die, howbeit, as thy deed
Hath given to the enemies of the Lord
About thee great occasion to blaspheme,
The child born unto thee shall surely die.

*[Bathsheba crieth and falleth in a swoon. Servants
hastily carry her forth. Nathan goeth out.]*

David. Stay Nathan, leave me not in all my woe.
These fearful words to my repentant soul
Are better from the Lord and from thy lips
Than loneliness with evil and despair.
Tarry, I do beseech thee.

[Servants enter, troubled in spirit.]

Servant. Let my lord
The king forgive his servants if they bring
Ill tidings to him, but the little child,
Thy youngest born, is stricken suddenly
And lieth in so desperate a case

That, as the queen doth yet lack consciousness,
We were constrained to seek thee.

David. Have they sent
To fetch the king's physician?

Servant. Aye, my lord,
With diligence, ere yet the child was sick
That he might give his succor to the queen.

David. Seek other aid. My power here is vain.

[*Servants go forth.*]

Now am I weak, though an anointed king.
My bones are broken and my soul is faint.
No longer may I seek Bathsheba's side
Lest she abhor me. I can neither heal
The infant's ills of flesh nor hers of heart.
The Lord is more long suffering than man.
To Him who smites me can I only turn
For mercy in the depths of my distress.

[*David kneeleth.*]

"O Lord, rebuke me not in all Thy wrath,
Nor in Thy hot displeasure chasten me.
Thine arrows pierce my soul, Thy heavy hand
Doth press me sore and mine iniquities
Do overwhelm me. I am e'en become
A byword to the heathen and a scorn
To all my lovers and desired friends.
Confusion is before me and the shame
Of just reproach by the blasphemer's tongue.
For how should I Thy statutes now declare
Or seek Thy covenant who thus have cast
Thy words behind me, for I am become
Partaker with adulterers, my mouth
By lying and deceit hath been defiled.
Innumerable evils compass me

And I do groan, abhorring all my sin.
Hear Thou my prayer, O Lord, behold my tears,
Let not this lamb be made a sacrifice
And take the terror of Thy stroke away,
For fearfulness and trembling have got hold
Upon me, and a horror of my deed.
Thy fierce wrath goeth over me. I lie
In all its darkness as amid the slain.
O spare me that I may recover strength
Before I wander hence and be no more.
I will declare this my iniquity
And sorrow for my sin. O gracious Lord
Of my salvation, spare the innocent
From sacrifice and cast me not away."

*[David goeth into the garden and falleth upon
his face upon the ground. The Steward and
some Elders of the household enter.]*

1st Elder. Behold, how sorely doth the king lament
His stricken child. I pray my lord the king
To rise and seek his bed, lest, lying here
On this cold ground, some illness come to pass.

2nd Elder. Aye, let the king consider. Is it wise
That Israel's guarding shepherd thus should put
His life in peril for one suckling lamb?

Steward. Let me, O king, beseech thy deafened ear,
Since morning thou hast eaten nothing. Take,
I pray thee, somewhat for thy nourishment,
Lest in thy grief a faintness come to thee.
The body should not share the spirit's pain.
A savory dish attends thee. Rise and eat.

1st Elder. Thy steward speaketh well. O mighty
king,
Forget not that, when thy brave spirit sinks,

It striketh terror into many hearts
And leadeth unto harm on every side.

2nd Elder. Our task is vain. No longer vex the king.
We will attend the evening that his grief
May then, perchance, abate and leave a way
For needful nourishment and soothing words.
But yonder walk our royal mistresses,
Their pleading better may avail with him.

[*Elders go forth hastily. Abigail and Maacah
draw nigh.*]

Maacah. I marvel not those elders summoned us.
Can it indeed be David, Israel's king,
Who thus doth lie lamenting on the ground
The ailing child of his last concubine,
Like some young husbandman of witless mind?
Speak thou to him. I would not such a lord.

Abigail. David, what sorrow thus should humble
thee?

Arise, let not thy more than forty years
So ill endure a child's infirmity.
Dost thou, beguiled by this Bathsheba's art,
Forget the faithful consorts of thy youth
And all their lawful tributes to thy love,
That thou dost cast thy majesty aside
And bring us to reproach? Gird up thy loins
And be again our lord and Zion's king.
Wilt thou not hear the voice of Abigail?
Am I, who pled thy cause in other days
And brought thee Nabal's riches with my heart
In thine extremity, to turn aside
And be forsaken for a younger breast,
Sharing the lot of Michal's loneliness?

Hath my strong Chileab whom I bore to thee
A jealous cause in yonder suckling's wail?

Maacah. And shall I, taken captive by thy sword
And trembling witness of its bloody wrath
When thou didst neither man nor woman spare
In all my smitten land, when thou didst spoil
Its once fair cities and its happy vales,—
Shall I, who yet in treasonable love
Have given thee thy beauteous Absalom
And gentle Tamar, not a whit less fair,
Be cast away when this my comeliness—
Which thou didst call my children's heritage—
Sufficient dower of thy captive spouse,—
Doth fade at last? Shall I be left to seek
With my proud offspring, my subjected land
Of Geshur and my father Talmi's arms,
The scorn of all my kindred in my shame?

Abigail. Let us away, fair Maacah. As a stone
The king of Israel lieth. We do waste
Alike our pleading and our just reproach.

Maacah. Yet, though he be as stone, 'tis said of men
That walls have ears to hear. He may take heed
Of certain whisperings amid the courts
Of this fair house concerning her we hate
And this her child in eight brief months begot
Since brave Uriah's death. For further saith
Report that false Bathsheba, ere the king
Did fetch her from her mockery of grief,
Was seen of David's guard to enter here.
And, yet again, that Joab, now returned
From Ammon's siege and in Jerusalem
To with the king take council of the war,
Doth strangely smile at this and hold his peace.

Good Abigail, in vain we tarry here.
Let us go hence and take what joy we may
Amid our children, while our fallen king
Laments this infant's sickness less or more,
And, it may hap, some darker sorrow still.

PLACE II. The same. Seven days have passed. David lieth yet on the ground. The Steward and Elders come toward him.

1st Elder. What tidings now?

2nd Elder. Alas, the child is dead.
'Tis but a moment since the spirit passed
From that poor suckling and its wailing ceased.

1st Elder. When was it stricken? Scarcely do I know
From anxious service.

2nd Elder. 'Tis the seventh day
Since we did hasten at the nurse's cry
To seek the king's physician.

1st Elder. Even so,
A month of feeble life, a week of pain,
And all is ended. What availeth pride,
Or love, or riches, or a kingly crown?

2nd Elder. Enough of words. Go ye unto the king
And tell him that the infant is no more.

1st Elder. Nay, do you go, it is not in my heart,
When thus the king hath fasted seven days
With lamentation sore, to speak of death.

2nd Elder. But surely one must venture, lest he grieve
To his undoing, for behold he lies
Upon the earth as one in battle slain,
The hue of death upon him and his flesh
All wasted by his fasting and his woe.
Steward go thou and pray that he do eat.

Steward. Behold, while this his child was yet alive,
We spake unto him and he would not hear
Our voices. How will he then vex himself,
If we do tell him that the child is dead?
I cannot, at my peril, do this thing.

David. Is the child dead?

1st Elder. My lord, the child is dead.

David. Give me thy hand, for I am very weak,
And help me to arise. Now lead me hence
That I be washed and in apparel new
Be clad that I may seek the holy ark
And worship with a spirit cleansed of sin,
Then will I eat in mine own house again.

Steward. Nay, let me serve thee now, my lord the
king.
Drink but a cup of wine, for thou art faint.

[*Steward hasteneth to David and offereth
wine; the King drinketh.*]

David. It doth suffice. I bid ye lead me hence.

2nd Elder. What thing is this, my lord, that thou hast
done?

While yet the child was living, thou didst fast
And weep, but when to-day the child is dead,
Thou hast arisen and commanded food.

David. While he was yet alive I fasted sore
And wept, for I bethought me, who can tell
Whether God will be gracious unto me
That he may live, but now that he is dead,
Wherefore should I continue thus to fast?
Can I bring back the parted soul again
To my poor infant? I shall go to him,
But he shall nevermore return to me.

PLACE III. The chamber of Bathsheba. Bathsheba bowed in grief. Nathan entereth.

Nathan. The Lord abide, Bathsheba, in thine heart
And strengthen thee to bow before His will,
Making His face to shine upon thy gloom.

Bathsheba. Nathan, thy mercy in this bitter hour
Comes like a balm of Gilead, for my heart
Is rent with lamentation for the child—
My lovely lamb which they did take away
This morning on its bier to give the ground.
I strove but yesterday to soothe its pain
And now my breast shall never warm it more,
Or these unwearied arms my blessing hold.

Nathan. Rest thee, my dear Bathsheba, seek the sleep
Thou needst after eight long days of woe.

Bathsheba. Nay, gracious Nathan, nor yet can I rest,
For they have said that David lieth without
Upon the ground, abased in sore distress
Since the child's illness and refuseth food.
I pray thee seek him lest he also die
And I be doubly stricken in mine heart.

Nathan. O comfort thee, Bathsheba, for the king
Rose up when he did hear the child was dead,
And washed and was anointed, and betook
Himself to worship in the curtained tent
Where rests the ark, and afterwards did eat,
And slept in happy peace throughout the night.

Bathsheba. Praise God that yet he liveth and is well,
My tower of defense, my loving spouse.
No strength but his could such contrition pass.
And wherefore came he not to comfort me?

Nathan. He dreaded lest his face should be despised
And bid me crave thy pardon for his sin
Ere he should seek thee.

Bathsheba. Do thou bid him come
And learn the greeting which my heart doth hold.
Yet tarry, Nathan, lest thou think my soul
Is worthy to condemn him for a fault
He bore to shelter me from shame and death,
I will to thee confess as dark a sin
And ease its cruel burden ere I rest.

Nathan. Nay, my poor child, I know whereof thy soul
Doth bow in its contrition.

Bathsheba. Yet dost thou,
O righteous Nathan, thus endure my face
And comfort me?

Nathan. Aye, dear Bathsheba, thine
Was such temptation as no woman's heart
In Israel might withstand, for David's love
Is as a ravening lion in its strength
And thou wast comfortless when it compelled
Thy youthful beauty and thy gentle soul.
Perchance my zeal for David had its part
In doing thine imagination wrong,
Yet, whatsoever thing led thee to fall,
Thy soul hath since, in bitter sacrifice
And penitent lament, atonement made
For its transgression, and the Lord hath turned
His wrath aside and waiteth now to bless.
And of thy seed, in token that the Lord
Accepteth David's penitence and thine,
The first shall be a son whom He shall love
And give to him, beyond the kings of earth,
Riches and glory and, in greater fame,

Wisdom and understanding to exceed
The ancient east and Egypt, and a heart
Of largeness as the sand upon the shore.

Bathsheba. O Nathan, thou art very merciful.
I thank the Lord for these thy tender words
Which greatly do uphold me in my grief.
If thou canst teach my father to forgive
As thou hast done, I yet shall hope again.
Behold my David cometh. Ever thus
He entereth with every hope that springs
From my deep heart to seek a higher joy.

[*David entereth, and, after regarding Bathsheba, fondly
embraceth her.*]

David. Thou dost forgive, Bathsheba.

Bathsheba.

What am I?

My king, my best belovéd, to reproach
Or put away my heart's supreme delight,
My sweetest consolation in distress.

David. So shall I be and more in every joy
Of faithful years before all Israel
While life remaineth, for the Lord hath sent
Forgiveness to His servant and shall bless
And sanctify our love to higher ways.
Wherefore, that none may further vex my soul,
I will confess my sin unto the Lord
Before the people of Jerusalem,
That He forgive its wickedness and put
The heathen and mine enemies to shame
Who mock at my calamity, and show
The wonders of His mercy to the heart
That bows itself in penitence to Him.

Nathan. Now David, shall the Lord His love restore
For this thy just repentance in His sight
And in thy people's, shaméd of thy sin.

David. His gentleness hath made me great. His love
Doth most bestow where meekness waits His will.
In my great sorrow have I learned to heed
The God of my salvation and to serve
His grace alone and not the pride of man.
Go thou, good Nathan, bid the people meet
Before the curtained tent to hear their king.
Bid Abigail and Maacah—all my wives—
And these my jealous sons of them begot,
And bid Benaiah, captain of my guard,
Ziba and Micah, lame Mephibosheth,
And all that wait upon me in mine house.
See thou that haughty Joab heareth me,
And brave Abishai, and my captains all
Of Israel's host who now in Zion rest,
And Zadok and Abiathar the priests,
Eliam, Ethan, Heman, Gad the wise.
Jehoshaphat, recorder of my reign,
And all who either love me or abhor.

Nathan. I go to do thy will. The Lord bestow
His spirit that thy uprightness prevail
And gain its recompense in Israel's heart.

[*Nathan goeth out.*]

Bathsheba. How marvelous, my love, is thy just soul
In its abasement. I would hinder thee,
Pleading my need of comfort from thy lips
And all thy grievous fasting in excuse,
But that I dare not let my love abate
The glory of thy righteousness. I bow
In anguish that my beauty should have wrought

So deep a snare and turned thy faithful feet
From walking in the perfect way of God.
Henceforth Bathsheba liveth but to serve
And magnify the honor of her king.

David. O beautiful Bathsheba, comfort thee,
Let thy sweet spirit be at peace within
And thy deep heart forget itself in mine,
Which giveth thee the fulness of its love,
The high dominion of its tenderness.
What ill of body, persecuting tongue,
Calamity of wealth or woman's snare
Can turn me from the rapture of thy smile,
The joyful inspiration of thine eyes,
The love that springs from sorrow sanctified?

Bathsheba. Ah this is thine, my spouse, unceasingly.

David. Then shall it all my wanton strength restore
Beyond the hurt of fasting and of woe,
And in the Lord's forgiveness shall I stand
Defying yet the heathen and in song
Extolling present mercies, thus upheld
To bear the fiery judgment which shall come
By prophecy of Nathan from His hand.

Bathsheba. Yet hath the prophet spoken words of joy,
Ere thou didst enter, which withdrew my soul
From hopeless lamentation, for he spake
Of one to be begotten in our love
Who shall be glorified throughout the earth
For riches, and for wisdom as is not,
Nor yet hath been, among the sons of men.

David. Did Nathan verily speak thus to thee?

Bathsheba. As thy soul liveth, David, my beloved,
By this he banished weeping from mine eyes
And stilled the groaning of my wounded breast.

David. Then let our hearts rejoice for, in the faith
That God remembereth His promise made
When I would build an house unto His name,
We may behold our offspring lifted up
In majesty to glorify His word,
And take no thought for sorrows yet to be.

Bathsheba. And wilt thou now, my David, make me
pledge
That my first son in lawful love begot
Shall be appointed to succeed thy reign
And govern Israel's tribes in righteousness?

David. I swear it, dear Bathsheba, as I live
And stand in expectation to lift up
My voice in full confession of my sin.

Bathsheba. So is my grieving ended. Go thy way
The Lord be with thee to accept thy voice
And yet redeem from every dreaded ill.
Here will I sit with meek and prayerful heart
To listen for the shout "Long live the king,"
And here attend thy coming in the bliss
Of gratitude that David is mine own.

[*David embraceth Bathsheba and goeth out.*]

PLACE IV. An open place before the Tabernacle. All the persons
of this writing amid the assemblage except Bathsheba.

Nathan. Ye men of Judah and of Israel,
King David, servant of the righteous Lord
And mighty leader of your valiant host,
Doth call you in his great humility
To know the evil deeds that he hath done
Concerning brave Uriah and his house,
And learn the peace that cometh to the soul
Which maketh thus confession of its sin.

Let all the people hear and give their heart
To him whose words the Lord hath sanctified
In praises of His mercy and His love.

[David cometh forward.]

David. Let Israel and Judah hear my words
Which Heman, chief musician shall rehearse,
That all who sin among the sons of men
May learn to follow where their king hath led
And comfort take when heart and voice unite
To magnify the Lord that keepeth him.
Have mercy upon me, O Lord my God,
According to Thy loving kindness and
Thy multitude of tender mercies, blot
Out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly
From mine iniquity and cleanse from sin.
For I acknowledge my transgression and
My sin is e'er before me. Against Thee,
Thee only, have I sinned and in Thy sight
This evil done, that thou be justified
When Thou dost speak and clear when Thou dost judge.
Behold how shapen in iniquity
I was, and, in my mother's sin, conceived.
Behold, O Lord, Thou dost desire truth
In inward parts and in the hidden part
Shalt make me to know wisdom. Purge me, Lord,
With hyssop and my soul shall yet be clean,
Wash me and I shall whiter be than snow.
Make me to hear of joy and gladness that
The bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice;
Hide Thy face from my sins and blot away
All mine iniquities. Create in me,
O God, a clean heart and renew within
A righteous spirit. Cast me not away

From Thy pure presence and take not from me
Thy holy spirit. Unto me restore
The joy of Thy salvation and uphold
Me with Thy spirit free. Then will I teach
Transgressors of Thy ways and unto Thee
Shall sinners be converted. O, my God,
Deliver me from guiltiness of blood,
Thou God of my salvation, and my tongue
Shall sing aloud of all Thy righteousness.
O Lord, let Thou Thy spirit touch my lips
And this my mouth shall shew forth all Thy praise.
For Thou dost not desire sacrifice,
Else would I give it. Thou delightest not
In burning offerings. The sacrifice
That pleaseth Thee a broken spirit is,
A broken and a contrite heart, O Lord,
Thou wilt not now despise. Do good in Thy
Good pleasure unto Zion and build Thou
The walls of fair Jerusalem around,
Then shalt Thou, O forgiving Lord, be pleased
With sacrifices made in righteousness,
With offerings and whole burnt offerings,
Then shall they offer bullocks on Thine altar.

(Psalm LI.)

BOOK IV.

DAVID AND ABISHAG.

FROM I KINGS, CH. 1ST AND 2ND, AND
I CHRONICLES, CH. XX TO XXIX.

DAVID AND ABISHAG.

THE PERSONS WHO HOLD DISCOURSE IN THIS WRITING,

DAVID, *the King of Israel and Judah.*

SOLOMON, *his son, Prince, afterwards King.*

NATHAN, *the Prophet.*

ZADOK, *the Priest.*

BENAIAH, *a Captain of the Host.*

JEHOSHAPHAT, *a Recorder.*

HUSHAI, *the King's Companion.*

ABISHAG, *a Shunammite Maiden.*

BATHSHEBA, *Wife of David, mother of Solomon.*

Servants of David and Solomon.

The time of this Chronicle is in David's old age, and the place his bed chamber in the Palace at Jerusalem.

DAVID AND ABISHAG.

THE PARTS SET FORTH IN THIS WRITING.

PART I.

David *and* Jehoshaphat.

PART II.

David, Jehoshaphat, Benaiah, Hushai *and* Abishag.

PART III.

David *and* Abishag. *Then* Bathsheba. *Then* Nathan, Zadok
and Benaiah. *Then* David *and* Abishag.

PART IV.

David *and* Abishag. *Then* Nathan, Zadok, Benaiah *and* Hushai.
Then Solomon *and* Bathsheba.

PART V.

David, Abishag, Bathsheba *and* Solomon.



DAVID AND ABISHAG.

DAVID AND ABISHAG.

PART I.

PLACE.—A chamber of the palace. David, infirm of age and warmly wrapped, lieth on a couch, a crown and an harp at his side. Jehoshaphat is seated at a table hard by with many scrolls, and Hushai sitteth also nigh the king.

David. Jehoshaphat, our years as dry leaves fall
Nigh to the end. My hoary head doth find
This crown a burden, not alone in woes
But even in its gold and marvelous gems.

[David putteth the crown on his head.]

Lo, under it I tremble who o'ercame
In youth the lion and Goliath's strength,
And made Philistine hosts to flee in fear
Before a might that knew no weariness.

[David replaceth the crown.]

Yet, though my life now seemeth of little worth
And doleful in its harvest, I would know
If thou hast made its later records true,
That men who seek for glory may give heed
To gain it worthily before the Lord
And shun my errors while they praise my zeal,
Learning yet more the blessedness of peace.

Jehoshaphat. My lord the king, wherein amid my
scrolls
Shall I take up the record of thy reign?

David. Go back, my faithful scribe, to those glad days
When proud Bathsheba gave me Solomon,
God's merciful atonement for my sin,
Love's richest offering, hope's highest trust,
To make me still the curse of blood endure.

Jehoshaphat. Lo, I have written all and how the Lord
Loved Solomon and gave to him the name
Of Jedediah to betoken it.

David. What followeth?

Jehoshaphat. Then Joab worthily
Didst send for thee to leave the glory thine
Of overthrowing Rabbah, which was called
City of Waters. This thy valor won
And the rich crown that now doth seem so vain,
And spoil in great abundance. And thy wrath
Smote all the people of that long defense
Killing with saw and harrow, axe and flame.

David. Yea, I forgot the mercy I had pled
Of God, in all the fierceness of my rage
And cruelty of vengeance. Verily
The evil soul that smote Uriah down
Was still unbound and like the soul of Saul.
Thus might despiseth pity, but even my age
In all its weakness holdeth chastisement
For two offenders yet whose crimes defy
Compassion often given. I pray thee draw
This drapery about me. I am cold.
Youth's burning heart seemeth already quenched,
No longer now excusing evil deeds:
These justice smites, while sometimes merciful
To sudden rage of spirit such as mine.
God sees the heart.

Jehoshaphat. Now shouldst thou rest, my lord.

David. Nay, do thou read the record. What is next?

Jehoshaphat. Let me delay a space.

David. Read on to me.

Jehoshaphat. Then will I hasten, for the record tells
Of woes within thy house, of Amnon's wrong
To lovely Tamar and the just revenge
Of Absalom her brother, when he bade
His kindred to the shearing of his sheep:
Of how, at Amnon's death, he fled from thee
And thy forgiveness of him in thy love,
When Joab's cunning gave thy heart excuse.

David. My beauteous Absalom!

Jehoshaphat. Then must I read
Of his conspiracy against thy throne,
And thy departure in thy first distress
With Zadok, Ziba and Abiathar,
Reviled by Shimei of the house of Saul
Who followed cursing thee and casting stones,
Calling "Thou bloody man of Belial."
Then, counseled by Ahithophel, thy son
Fulfilled God's curse upon thee, to his shame,
In his dishonor of thy concubines,
But, scorning wiser teaching for thy fall,
Was smitten, to Ahithophel's despair.

David. Yea, truly in that day of dark distress
Didst thou, my friend Hushai, serve thy king
By cunning counsel unto Absalom
That overcame Ahithophel's device,
Since his was surer to beget mine end.
Thy soft dissimulation, verily,
Was, by the grace of God, even as an host
To bring confusion to rebellious foes,
For this shrewd Gilonite, who turned away

From service to his king, was very deep
In every evil craftiness of the law
And stratagem of strife. Thy skill alone
Didst save me, unprepared, from the sword
And gain me time to make my throne secure.
Hence thou art here companion of my choice
And counselor and comfort in my day
Of weakness, though it be rebellion now
Of treasonable years that none may quell.

Hushai. My lord the king is gracious in his words,
But, verily, I strove in thy distress
And opportunity for loyal zeal,
To serve thee faithfully, despite the woes
Of cunning with thy son, the perils met
In overcoming base Ahithophel,
The troubles of deceit in righteousness;
Until, before thy power through the Lord,
The hosts of Absalom were put to flight
And his sad life the oak to Joab gave.

David. Yea, Joab slew the pride of Israel;
From head to foot no blemish could be found
Upon him. Why was any spread within
To contradict the glory of the clay?
He, peradventure, was but chosen out
Unwittingly to serve the Lord's decree
Of chastisement for my iniquity
To gain Bathsheba,—he the one beloved
Who most of all could rend my heart with grief
By any evil or ingratitude.
Alas, my Absalom, my cherished child.

Jehoshaphat. Cannot my lord find joy in other sons?
Lo, after Amnon by Ahinoam,
Is Chileab by Abigail conceived.

David. This child of Maon lacks his mother's zeal.

Jehoshaphat. And after Absalom, whom Maacah bore,
Comes Adonijah, a most goodly man,
The son of Haggith, free from all reproach.

David. Yea, but his heart is hidden, and the pride
Of Absalom was of a kingly race
And strove for good or ill with zeal I loved.

Jehoshaphat. Then there is Shephatiah from the womb
Of Abital, and Ithream whom the love
Of Eglah gave thee,—six in Hebron born,
But Absalom and Amnon now no more.
Moreover, in Jerusalem begot,
Are Shammuah and Shobab, Nathan too,
And Solomon belovéd of the Lord,
These four Bathsheba gave to thy desire.
Lo others—Ibhar and Elishua
And Nepheg, Elishama, Japhia
And Eliada and Eliphalet,
Fifteen in all, who stand before thy face,
With other sons of chosen concubines
In due obedience.

David. Yea, they are dear
To memories of love and sweet desire—
Moons of the planets which have circled me
And shone in all the radiance of my heart,
But three in brighter glory—Michal first,
The daring love of youth, perverted long,
Next Abigail the light in my distress
Amid the wilderness to hope renew,
And then Bathsheba, victim of my sin,
The passion of my might and high renown,
Raised unto honor by my penitence
And all the mercy of the Lord, and blessed

In Solomon who shall exalt my throne.
Now hast thou read the tale of all my sons.
But, if the love of women often fails,
How may I prove the heart of those they bear
Who cannot share the yearning that conceived
Their being and are set in jealous watch
Of kingly heritage? Lo there is none
Created in his beauty for a king
Like Absalom my proud and erring child.
But since the Lord hath blessed Solomon
And promised to Bathsheba's son the rule
Of Israel in riches, righteousness
And wisdom over all the kings of earth,
My soul hath comfort to my pledge maintain
In crowning him above his brethren all,
Whatever justice jealousy may wear.
But let me to thy record yet attend,
I break it grieving over Absalom.

Jehoshaphat. Lo at thy nephew Joab's hard reproach,
Didst thou unto Jerusalem return
And kingly tasks, and ordering of peace,
Pardoning Shemei, to Mephibosheth
Renewing love, and to Barzillai,
That great and rich old man of Gilead,
Proving thy gratitude for all his aid.

David. Yea he was good, and wise to be content
In his own city, knowing that its joy
And honor could all kingly gift surpass.

Jehoshaphat. Thereafter Israel and Judah strove
In title to thy favor and ere long
Sheba awoke rebellion in the camp
Of Israel. When Amasa went forth
To smite the foe, then did the bloody hand

Of jealous Joab slay him shamelessly
And, at the last, in Abel's hold beset
An honored woman compassed Sheba's death.
Then came a famine, and the Lord decreed
Unto the Gibeonites from thy sad hand
In dread atonement seven sons of Saul
Whose wrath had wronged these people in the past.
And Rizpah's two were given and the five
Whom Michal had brought up for Adriel,
Her sister's spouse. The seven all were hanged,
And Rizpah watched their bodies many days.
Then did thy pity order that their bones,
And those of Saul the king and Jonathan,
Should be together buried in the tomb
Of Kish, and but Mephibosheth is left.

David. Yea, I did save the son of Jonathan,
Remembering the covenant of love
Between us—that high covenant alone
Which I have faithfully kept unto the end.
But in my heart I would have saved all.
Poor Merab truly did not die too soon,
And Michal now but hateth me the more,
Who, in the woe of my anointing, seem
To bear the guilt of all her kindred's blood.
Alas, how love hath ended. Aye alas
For gentle Merab's hope. And what remains?

Jehoshaphat. Here do I read the last of all thy strife
With the Philistine hosts in valiant deeds
When, in thy failing strength, the hand that slew
Goliath lost its cunning and had found
Ishbi-benob avenger of his doom
But for Abishai's succor. Then no more,
Since other giants rose in heathen hosts,

Would any let thee seek the battle's front,
Lest these should quench the light of Israel.
Of all thy mighty men, three most possessed
The glory of thy valor and thy zeal.
First was Adino, of the captains chief,
Who slew in single strife eight hundred men,
And Eleazar after him, whose sword
Turned a defiant heathen host to flight,
And Shammah who was great in equal deed.
And after these, of thirty mighty men,
Three more of valiant heart, when thou didst yearn
For water from the well of Bethlehem,
Fetched it through pools of hot Philistine blood,
And thou didst make oblation to the Lord.
And yet again were three, Abishai loved,
Brother of Joab, but of greater soul,
Who smote three hundred, and Benaiah brave
And faithful unto thee in weal or woe,
Who slew a lion and three mighty foes—

David. These will suffice to-day, for I am weak.
Turn thee to records of the kingdom's course.

Jehoshaphat. These took the deeds of valor from thy
years,
But when thy skill in each device of war
Had set thy hosts by valiant captains led
To yet again crush the Philistine pride
And end thy wars with these thy life-long foes,
Then did thy voice extol in mighty song
The majesty and goodness of the Lord
And make thanksgiving to the King of Kings
For all His grace to thee throughout thy years.
Yet pride or fear too soon succeeded praise,
Since thou didst number all of Abram's seed

To find eight hundred thousand valiant men
Of war in Israel and Judah's strength
Five hundred thousand. And the Lord was wroth
That thou shouldst count, instead of trusting Him
Who taught thy single hand in youth His power,
And gave thee choice of His or man's rebuke.
Then didst thou trust His mercy more than man's
But, in the pestilence His will ordained,
Were tens of thousands, seventy 'tis writ,
Destroyed before His judgment was fulfilled
And the confession of thy sin prevailed;
Whereat, upon Araunah's threshing floor
By Gad's command, didst thou an altar raise
And make a sacrifice unto the Lord—
Burnt offerings and offerings of peace.
By these was God entreated for the land
And stayed the plague that chastened Israel.
My lord the king, here doth my record end.

David. And it is faithful, telling as I would
The punishments and blessings of His hand,
Who, raising me from poor but zealous youth
To majesty beyond control of men,
Hath ruled me yet from His almighty throne
To break all pride and arrogant desire
And bring mine age to meeker faith and praise;
A Father still, beyond rebellious thought
Of kingly will or white infirmity,
As Jesse was when I but watched his flock.
Is not the palace cold, my friend, to-day?
I cannot get me heat. Do thou again
Wrap me a little closer. Ah how vain
Is purple raiment when it giveth not
The comfort that I found in youth at night
On Bethlehem's hills, close lying with my sheep.

PART II.

PLACE.—The same. David upon his couch. Servants are removing food from before him and smoothing his coverings.

David. The choicest meats have little savor now,
There is no spice to give me hunger more
As in my youth or in the wilderness,
And lo—I can but taste and put away.

[*A Servant entereth.*]

Servant. My lord the king, Benaiah of thine host
And Hushai do await to speak with thee.

David. Bid them come in.

[*The Servant bringeth in Benaiah, Hushai and
Abishag, the latter tarrying by a curtain.*

Draw near, good friends, to me.

Benaiah. How fares my lord? I pray Jehovah's arm
Is roundabout thee to thy strength uphold.

David. The Lord sustaineth me, Benaiah, yet,
But rather in my spirit than my flesh,
For I must soon return unto the dust
From which He mouldeth all men and give up
My soul unto His keeping evermore.
I get no warmth, my body waxeth cold
And kindred to the clay.

Hushai. Nay, mighty king,
The arm that slew Goliath cannot chill
And, were it cold, would yet have strength to smite
Philistine foes, now humbled many years,
Should any yet defy thy majesty.

David. Thou canst, Hushai, better wield thy tongue
Than I my sword, who scarce can lift my crown.
Behold me wrapped in wool of royal dye,
Yet cold in all my bones and envious
Of any lusty youth, however poor.

Hushai. Take courage, O my lord. Thy kingdom's
cares,
The weariness of thy records and accounts,
The jealousies that strive within thy house,
And lack of some beguiling tenderness
Have turned thy blood to water and beset
Thy heart with sadness and a dread of woes
That do thee ill.

David. How may I thrust them hence?

Hushai. Our king hath need of comfort. 'Tis the
fault
Of age to gaze upon itself too long
When the wild stream of life becometh still,
And to o'erstep the path of its descent
Into the dark unknown. Let but my lord
Look back upon the sunlight and again
Think of his joys of spirit in the past.
Oh mighty king, remember all the shouts
Of praise thy valor spread amid the hosts
Of Israel and Judah. Let thine ear
Attend once more the clear exultant songs
Of women, when by thee Goliath fell,
Harken in proud imagination yet
To many captives pleading thee to spare.
And, sweetest thought of all, remember still
The loveliness of women who have turned
From every bond of comfort, race or faith
To glory in the joy of thy desire.

David. Aye these are gladdening thoughts, but they
are dreams
That fade in age's waking.

Hushai. Nay, my lord,
Let not thy soul despair of kindred joys.
At seventy thou art not now so old.
Behold, thy servants in their love for thee
Have taken counsel for thy happiness.
We have considered, in thy weary days,
The tenderness and fulness of thine heart,
To give it consolation and renew
Warmth to thy bosom as in joyous years.
This of thy will already have we asked,
Saying, "Let there be sought out for the king
A virgin young and beautiful, to stand
Before my lord and cherish him and lie
Upon his bosom that he may get heat."
Wherefore, as thou didst not our thought deny,
We since have sought a damsel young and fair
Throughout the coasts and breadth of Israel
And found a Shunammite, Abishag called,
And brought her hither to my lord the king.
Come forth Abishag, fear not to draw nigh.
[*Abishag boweth down before David.*

Behold her. She is fair to look upon
Beyond all virgins of thy kingdom known,
And glad of heart to seek thy royal grace.

David. Yea, she is very fair. Mine eyes rejoice
To measure all her gifts of comeliness
What art thou called, fair maiden?

Abishag. O, my king,
Abishag is the name I humbly pray
Thy voice may know in gracious tenderness.

David. I am persuaded thou shalt teach it this
With no long tarrying. Ye have well done,
My friends, in this your search to comfort me.
Wherefore let all depart that I alone
May talk with this fair damsel as I would.

[*Benaiah, Hushai and Servants go forth.*
Tell me, Abishag, something of thy days.

Abishag. My lord the king, I know not how to speak,
Since all my days are few and they have passed
At Shunem in the land of Issachar
With nothing for my heart to chronicle
Until thy servants sought me for thy smile.

David. But as I am so gladdened by thy face
And like thee well, tell me the little things,
Tell of the dews that thus have made thee bloom.

Abishag. Lo when, my lord, I was no more a child
Nor yet a woman, I was still withheld
In peaceful household ways. I spun the flax
And broidered garments and, when I was taught
The records and the laws of Israel,
The books of Moses and the Judges' rule,
The power of Samuel, the reign of Saul,
His wars and those of noble Jonathan
And of their death in battle nigh to us,
Before my birth, on Mount Gilboa's side,
I most gave ear unto the valiant deeds
Of mighty men of war. And when I knew
Of all thy zeal and heard thy psalms rehearsed,
Thy fame was my delight.

David. Thy loyal heart
Beguieth, fair Abishag, as thy face.
And how were passed thine hours of idleness?

Abishag. I, with my family, went to Israel's feasts
And on the Sabaoth to the sacrifice,
But often on the housetop sat at eve
In the refreshing wind that gave to us
Gilboa's greeting. There I watched the stars
And yearned for some new life they might foretell.
Then lo, upon a day, came certain men
Into the village when I walked without
And sought my parents to discourse of me.
And many neighbors, who in idle hours
Talked of my beauty, questioned of the thing
To my confusion when, amid them all,
Thy servants led me forth to come to thee.

David. And was there then no youth to gain thy tears
At thus forsaking him?

Abishag. Nay, O my king;
Though many young men of the place had sought
To gain my favor, few were let within
My father's house and none was dear to me,
Or worthy to detain my joyous feet
From serving thee, the gracious star's reward.

David. And hast thou seen no man to be desired
Since thou hast left thy village?

Abishag. Saving one,
No man hath talked with me, for roundabout
Thy servants journeyed with me watchfully,
To guard me even from all curious eyes.

David. Who was the one, and how did he prevail
Against their duty?

Abishag. It was told to me
That he was Adonijah of thy sons,
A prince of Israel. And lo, behold,
When we had come within Jerusalem

And as my camel knelt and swayed to earth,
I slipped and would have fallen, had not thy son,
Who stood with others nigh the palace gates,
Aided thy servants, seeing then my face
The chance unveiled and speaking kindly words.
These they could not deny and he, who knew
Thy servants' vestures, led thine handmaid in.

David. The thing is well. Had one of other house
Accosted thee, I should have little spared
My careless servants for their rude mishap,
But it is naught and now thou art secure.
Come nigh to me, Abishag, for mine eyes
Are not the eyes of youth. Nay, do not bow
Again before me. Think me not thy king
But one whose heart is open to thy trust
And grateful for thy dear companionship.
Ah were the weight of half my years removed,
My heart before thy beauty would awake
Desire to such valorous assault,
And voice to such a pleading tenderness,
That thy dark eyes would speedily avow
A vain resistance and thy lips agree
To new-found joy in long captivity.

Abishag. My lord, I know as well, from wide report,
The valor of thy heart as of thy sword,
And, notwithstanding this thy hoary head,
Thy dimméd eyes, thy body's feebleness,
Some far enchantment yet abides with thee
To gladden me for all that might have been.
Thy spirit holdeth to its tribute still,
Even as a mighty tree whose fading life
Yieldeth to lesser neighbors in their shade
But whose bared branches point unto the stars.

David. Strife more than years hath made my branches
bare

And thou, perchance, mayest yet extend thy love
Beyond a reverence* for leafless age,
Forgetting I am but a wrinkled king
Before my time, from wars and much distress,
And shunning not these cold and withered hands
Which have caressed so many a woman fair?

Abishag. Yea, I can love thee as all women love
A man whose heart adareth loveliness
And dareth all things for them, even though cares
Have left him but the ruins of desire,
Since these are often beautiful in vines
Of an enduring, gentle, generous bloom,
While showing yet some glory of the past
And what their pillars have upheld before.

David. Lo, I was once a temple in my strength
Whose every marble pillar held unmoved
The far outspreading roof of kingly love
Above the tabernacle of my heart.
But if, in time, the hearts of men dispute
The will of patriarchs and kings, or men
Of riches and of power in the earth,
To cherish many women in their love,
As it hath ever been, they shall be wise
In sparing jealousy and household strife
Through single love such as the many know
In sweeter higher joy if fitly wed,
Yet grant the vigor of a shepherd's youth,
The might of one who hath his thousands slain,
The willing hearts of Israel's loveliness,
The riches and the power to delight
And yet the singer's tenderness of soul,

And he who is so bountifully blessed
Will surely find excuse for all excess
In these my days of joy and pardon one
Whose heart is great and full of gratitude.
But as I draw thee to my bosom now,
My fair Abishag, I do know in truth
That I am but the ruin thou hast said,
That seventy long years of care surpass
For me an hundred of our father's peace.
Yet rest a space, thou lovely Shunammite,
Here on my bosom. Take me to thy heart,
Thou art a comfort to me. I perchance
May find the warmth of body sought so long.
Thy soul is good to me in this caress,
Thy cheek a balm, thy tender arm a joy.
Yet am I like the marble, gaining heat
But from without when the sun shines thereon
And, at his parting, feeling none within.
Yea, it is vain to dream of love again
And I would spare this weak similitude
To which compassion only can reply.

Abishag. Nay, my dear lord, my heart is full of pride
That Israel's king is gracious unto me,
That ruddy David by fair maidens sung
Hath found me beautiful, that one whose love
Kings' daughters have desired hath taken me
Into his bosom, and that he whose harp
Surpasseth all in praise hath spoken words
Of precious love as music to mine ears—
Words I shall treasure as life's sweetest prize.
How may the passion of a youth compare,
In its few moons of secret joy and pain,
With the great glory thou hast rendered now

By thus accepting me to soothe thine age
In Israel's sight, renowned for years to be.

David. My fair Abishag, verily thy words
Are even sweeter than this fond caress
And greater consolation. I am cold
Still in my flesh, despite thy close embrace,
But on the altar of my heart thy speech
Hath kindled an enduring higher flame.
Press me a little lest the chill return.
Yea, I am very old. Desire is dead,
The love of youth hath passed for evermore,
But thou, my lovely child, mayest cherish me,
By such sweet words and faithful tenderness
And watchful care, to make the little time
That yet remaineth like the peaceful hour
Before the crimson setting of the sun.
They who do stand without may witless smile
Regarding us and, in their idle thought,
Conceive no bond but lustful dalliance,
Yet we shall know a higher covenant
Abides between us. I have learned at last
The wisdom that befitteth these my years
And put away the foolish vanities
Forever that dispute their dignity,
Loving thee now less in thy comeliness
Than in the proven goodness of thy heart,
Which I shall well reward, if any gift
Can fitly honor attribute so fair.
And thou, Abishag, cherishing thy king
And reverencing but his better deeds,
Wilt, as a loving daughter, find thy joy
In ministering to my feebleness,
Banishing heavy cares and vain regrets,

Leading my every hope with gentle words
And giving peace in thy companionship
Until the cistern fails, the harp is dumb.
When after, it may be, some generous tears
Thy patience will be free, thy days thine own
To, with my blessing, live as God may guide,
A princess in the household of my son.
Now let me kiss thy brow and ask of thee
To let me turn again, and linger nigh,
For I am very weary and would sleep.
Rest will be sweeter with thee at my side.

PART III.

PLACE.—The same. David upon his couch. Abishag seated at his side.

Abishag. Now hast thou told me of thy Absalom
Unto the evil day when, by his hair,
He hung amid the oak and was no more.

David. Yea and no woman's hair could equal his,
No woman's face, unless it may be thine,
Could show his beauty. Had he wedded thee,
Kings for thy daughters would have warred and thrones
Sought for thy sons. Ah but for Tamar's woe
And all the wrath of Absalom thereat,
No evil spirit might have come to him
To end his days in wrong. Yet was my sin
Behind and under all.

Abishag. But tell me yet,
Was there no other beauteous daughter born
Unto thy love for many women fair?

David. She was the only flower in the wreath
Of children that my war bred ardor got
From woman's joy of valor, and her distress
Hath bound her lovely spirit unto years
Of solitude, compassionate deeds and prayer.
Wherefore I have no daughter, saving thee,
To cheer my heart and minister to ills.

Abishag. And I shall faithful be, my lord the king,
My father and my friend, to every need.

David. Thou hast my gratitude, fair child, the more
In all thy youthful hope and joyfulness,

Since those amid my wives whom most I loved
Are also bent with years and sad with care
And vain contention for their sons' desires
Of kingly heritage. In jealous age
They will not or they cannot comfort me.

[*A Servant entereth.*]

Servant. My lord the king, Bathsheba at the door
Attends to speak with thee.

David. Go bid her come.

[*The Servant bringeth Bathsheba.*]

What wouldst thou, Bathsheba?

Bathsheba. Will the king
Grant that I speak a space to him alone?

David. Yea as thou wilt. Abishag go without
Until I presently shall need thy care.

[*Abishag and the Servant go forth.*]

Bathsheba. My lord, thou swearest by the Lord thy
God

Unto thy handmaid thus, "Assuredly
Shall Solomon thy son reign after me
And he shall sit secure upon my throne,"
And now behold thine Adonijah reigns
Though thou dost know it not. But he hath slain
Oxen and cattle and abundant sheep
And he hath called unto him all thy sons
To feasting, and Abiathar the priest
And Joab, captain of the host, as well,
But he hath not called Solomon thy son.
Now, as thou shouldst know, my lord, O king,
The eyes of Israel are upon thee,
That thou shouldst tell them who should sit upon
The mighty throne of David after him,

Else it shall come to pass that when my lord
The king at length shall with his fathers sleep,
I and my true son Solomon by thee
Shall be esteemed offenders.

David. This alarm,
Bathsheba, can but come of woman's dread
And jealousy, for otherwise mine ears
Would sooner have such woeful tidings known
From counselors about me.

Bathsheba. Nay, my lord,
For in thy troubled age they now withhold
Full many matters that would wake distress.
The prophet Nathan told me and, as loth
Again to be a messenger of woe,
He bade me first to tell thee in my right
Of love and succor. He will follow me.
Lo, even now I hear his voice without.

[*A Servant entereth.*]

Servant. My lord the king. Nathan the prophet
waits.

David. Bring him to me. Must tears forever flow
From these poor sunken eyes? Is there no peace
That some rebellious child shall not destroy
Ere I have slept a kindred grief away?

[*Nathan entereth. Bathsheba goeth out.*
O Nathan what doth bring thee here to me?
Speak in thy fearless truth.

Nathan. My lord, O king,
Hast thou said "Adonijah after me
Shall reign and he shall sit upon my throne?"
For he is gone this day to En-rogel,
Even unto the stone of Zohemoth,

And slain fat cattle and abundant sheep,
 And called his brethren, even all thy sons,
 And all the men of Judah serving thee,
 Abiathar the priest and, furthermore,
 Joab and other captains of the host,
 And lo they eat and drink with him and say
 "God save King Adonijah." But behold,
 Me, even me thy servant, and the priest
 Zadok and great Benaiah, worthy seed
 Of Jehoiada, and Bathsheba's son
 Thy servant Solomon hath he *not* called.
 Is this thing ordered by my lord the king
 And thou hast showed it not to Solomon
 Who should upon thy throne sit after thee?

David. Call me Bathsheba.

[Nathan goeth forth and Bathsheba returneth.]

As the Lord doth live

And hath redeemed my soul from all distress,
 Even as I swear unto thee by the Lord
 The God of Israel, saying in former time,
 "Assuredly shall Solomon thy son
 Reign after me and shall upon my throne
 Sit in my stead," so will I do this day
 And certainly my word to thee fulfill.

[Bathsheba doeth reverence.]

Bathsheba. Let my lord David live forever king.

David. Bathsheba, age doth oft beget distrust
 Of many things and if thy heart hath held
 A doubt of me, let it be put away.
 Our love hath been so often sanctified
 By faithfulness through persecuting years,
 Hath been so glorified in fond desire,
 Whereof five sons, of which the first became

Our sacrifice, do but a portion prove
Of all our happiness that, though the mists
Of age surround, its glow must still remain,
And in the greatness promised of the Lord
To Solomon, His pledge of pardoning grace,
Love hath its holiest consolation now.

Bathsheba. O David, these thy words are passing
sweet

As dreams of youth renewed. They do restore,
In gathering years and oft assailing cares,
A peace that long hath turned from my breast.
But, if I may inquire, O my lord,
To quell the only trouble that remains,
Wherefore is this strange woman at thy side
During these latter days?

David. Distrust her not.
She is a Shunammite my servants brought,
Of kindly spirit and proven tenderness,
To cheer and cherish this my feeble age,
A virgin whom I know not, who bestows
A daughter's sweet compassionate love alone.
But perils compass us and now, to prove
My love for thee, I bid thee go without
And have my servants summon speedily
Nathan again and Zadok and, of all
My erring captains, true Benaiah here,
That I may counsel with them.

Bathsheba. They attend
Without already, fearing but delay,
And I will call them. May the Lord defend
My lord the king and Solomon my son.

[*Bathsheba goeth out. Nathan, Zadok and
Benaiah come to David.*]

David. Ye faithful to your king, in this alarm
Words need be few but speedy acts our care.
Gather to you the servants of your lord
And Solomon, and cause my son to ride
Upon my mule to Gihon. There do ye,
Zadok and Nathan, then anoint him king
Of Israel and blow the trumpet there
Saying "God save King Solomon," and then
Ye shall come after him, that he may come
And sit upon my throne, for he shall be
King in my stead. I have appointed him
To be the ruler over Israel
And over Judah, as the Lord hath said,
For now must younger hands the crown defend.

Benaiah. Amen. The Lord thy God His will perform.
As He hath been with thee, my lord the king,
So may He be with Solomon thy son
To make his throne greater than this of thine,
Since all thy glory will he then complete.
We go to do thy will.

David. The Lord sustain
All that ye do.

Nathan. How shall His promise fail?
God's might abides, He never groweth old.

[*Nathan, Zadok and Benaiah go forth.*]

David. There was but this to do before I die,
Since peril waiteth on my fleeting breath,
That, with the sceptre I no more can hold
In trembling hands, my chosen Solomon
May guard the trust that God to me bestowed
And in His love reign wise and glorious,
Building unto Jehovah's prayer and praise
The holy house at my offense withheld.

Yet in repentance have I known the joy
Of every preparation for his rule.
Over the host, the treasure and the grain
And fruit and flocks and service of the land,
Have I appointed officers by name
For every task and station. To serve the Lord,
The Levites and the priests know each his place
And duty in the offerings; no less
The singers and musicians fitly stand,
Judges are set to give a just decree
And princes learn their tasks of government.
Though most the arts of music and of war
Have won my zeal, yet have I equal sought
To set in order all the kingdom's course
And spare my son the toil that won my throne.
Then, for the holy house the Lord ordains,
Have I collected all the builder's need
And artisans and workmen. At their hands
Are goodly cedars, stones hewn for their place
Of diverse colors, onyx and precious gems,
And a great store of iron, silver, brass
And mighty wealth of gold in which the gifts
Of many share this offering to the Lord.
These things have I declaréd unto all
The congregation of Jerusalem,
The princes and the people who rejoiced
In all their offerings and in the full
And perfect preparation I have made
To give the Lord an house on Zion's hill
In this the land He promised when He dwelt
In tents and journeyed long with Israel.
And unto Solomon have I bestowed
The patterns of the temple in all its parts,

And of all vessels and dedicated things
And ornaments of silver and of gold.
Now, therefore, as I to the people spake,
I say again—the glory is the Lord's.
Yea, unto Thee, O Lord, is all the power
The greatness, majesty and victory,
For all in heaven and in earth is Thine,
Thine is the kingdom, Thou art head of all.
Riches and honor come alike to Thee
And in Thy hand it is to make men great.
I thank Thee and I praise Thy glorious name.
For who are we, strangers and sojourners
Abiding not, that we should give to Thee?
The silver and the gold are all Thine own.
I also know, O Lord, that Thou dost try
The heart, with pleasure but in uprightness.
In this my heart hath made its offerings
And all Thy people. Keep Thou this, O Lord,
The God of Abraham and Israel,
In the imagination and the thought
And hearts of all and guide them unto Thee,
And give to Solomon a perfect heart
To keep Thy testimonies and commands
And statutes, that he do the things I would
And build Thy house of all I have prepared.
Thus is my labor ended and I wait
But for my son to take his heritage,
And overcome all who oppose his reign.
Yet, as I meditate on man's desires,
I marvel not at Adonijah's deed—
He, saving Chileab, the eldest born
And worthiest of all my living sons
Of Hebron birth—or that his brethren

Should, in my failing years, go after him
Rather than Solomon a younger child
Begot too nigh my sin. But I may mourn
The priest Abiathar's ingratitude,
Knowing from Nathan of Jehovah's choice
Yet turning to the arrogance of men.
And surely subtle Joab had a thought
But for his own advancement to sustain
The mightiest. Lo how can I forgive
This treason joinéd to his bloody deeds
In slaying Abner and my Absalom?
How are the ways of God past finding out,
That I was from the sheepfold taken forth,
Of all my elder brethren, to attain
To honor and the throne of Israel
Above all princes of the house of Saul.
And that, of these my sons, the Lord should turn
From those begot in Hebron, now esteemed
In man's estate and long experience
Of princely duty, to the child conceived
By one I gained through dread iniquity?
Yea, even might my younger sons forsake
Bathsheba's seed in lingering reproach,
But God doth bless the injured and atone
To innocence for care unjustly borne,
And Solomon who in fair Zion's walls,
My holy city, first beheld the sun,
Begotten of a daughter of its faith
By mercy and forgiveness of the Lord,
Hath still the radiance of love divine
About him to extol Jehovah's name
And promise in the place where He shall dwell.

[*Abishag entereth.*]

Abishag. How doth my lord the king? I fear the cares
Of thy discourse to-day hath taxed thee sore.

David. Aye verily, my daughter, but the waste
Is well if for my throne's endurance blessed,
Else is the feeble remnant of my life
Of little worth to me or Israel.

But now my meditations are of peace.
Give me my harp. My trembling hands once more
Would seek its comfort and beloved reply;
Perchance it is our last communion sweet.

[*Abishag giveth David his harp.*]

David. "O all ye lands, make joyful praise to God
And serve the Lord with gladness. Come before
His face with singing, know ye that the Lord
Is God alone. He made us, not ourselves.
We are His people, yea we are the sheep
He guardeth in the pasture of His grace.
O enter with thanksgiving at His gates
And go ye ever to His courts with praise.
Be thankful unto Him and bless His name,
The Lord is good. His mercy and His truth
Are everlasting." Let all ages sing. (Ps. C.)

Abishag. I know this beauteous psalm, with many
heard

Throughout the land, and I do bless the Lord
That now I hear it from thy lips inspired.

David. Yea I have often sung in care or joy,
But harken, child, to portions of a psalm
That I have lately written for my son.
"Give to the king Thy judgments, O my God,
And unto David's son Thy righteousness,
That mountains to the people shall bring peace,

That he shall help the needy and oppressed.
And shall redeem their souls from every woe,
Coming like showers to the grateful earth.
And he shall reign supreme from sea to sea,
Kings with their gifts shall bow before his might,
Daily in all the land shall he be praised,
His name shall last forever as the sun
And in his wisdom shall the earth be blessed.
Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel
Whose might and mercy doeth wondrous things.
Aye, blessed forever be His glorious name,
And with His glory let the earth be filled.
Amen, and now behold the prayers and song
Of David son of Jesse have an end.”
Alas, my child, I sing but feebly now,
My voice hath broken strings and this fond harp,
Which hath so often triumphed in my zeal,
Doth chide my shrunken hand's infirmity.
I can but sing in spirit. Put it by,
For I shall never strive to play again,
And keep it as a token of my love.

Abishag. My lord, no gift could grant me fuller joy.
Lo! I shall guard it as a holy thing
No other hand may shame, until thy son
Hath built the temple thou hast long prepared,
There in my age shall I make offering
Of this thy precious harp unto the Lord
And Israel whom it hath taught His praise.

David. Now give me warmer covering. I am cold
And weary. Let me sleep and sing in dreams.

PART IV.

PLACE.—The same. David upon his couch as if asleep. Abishag entereth and anxiously regardeth him. David openeth his eyes.

David. Where hast thou been, Abishag? But a space
Ago I fell asleep in sweeter rest
Because thou wert beside me, but I woke
At the confusion in the streets without—
The singing and the shouting, and, behold!
My comforter had fled.

Abishag. I did but go,
My lord, hearing the noise thou speakest of,
To know its meaning and, perchance, to still
The tumult for thy rest, but all in vain.

David. And wherefore do they shout? Can it be true
That Solomon is already Israel's king
And Adonijah fallen—even as I—
But he in fear and I in thankfulness?

Abishag. Yea, as thou sayest, O my lord, the shouts
Hail Solomon anointed and the flight
Of every foe arrayed against his throne.

David. The Lord be praised. What hast thou heard
thereof?

Abishag. This only, O my king.

David. Nay, king no more.

Abishag. Yea unto me thou art forever king,
Though all thy sons should rule what thou hast won,

For none can take thy valor and thy song,
These reign eternally. This jeweled crown
Hath no dominion of such majesty,
It knows but birth or power.

[*A Servant entereth.*]

Servant. My lord the king,
Nathan the prophet waiteth at the door
And others with him.

David. Bid them come to me.
But raise me first, Abishag, in my bed.

[*Abishag so doeth as Nathan, Zadok,
Benaiah and Hushai come in.*]

Nathan. Hail! Valiant David, first of Judah's line
And father of the king of Israel.

David. Then is thy holy task fulfilled in deed
And Adonijah fallen?

Zadok. Aye, my lord,
While all the land rejoiceth.

Benaiah. And the host
Stands faithful to King Solomon defend.

David. And what of Adonijah? Let me not
Grieve that his blood is shed.

Benaiah. Nay, he is well.

David. Then tell me, Nathan, all that ye have done.

Nathan. Behold, my lord, we who are here went down
With Cherethites and Pelethites—the band
Who guard the person of the king—and led
Solomon on thy mule to Gihon's street,
And Zadok from the Tabernacle there
Took forth an horn of oil, anointing him,
Whereat they blew the trumpet and lo all

The people said "God save King Solomon."
And all the people came up after him,
Piping with pipes, rejoicing with great joy,
So that the earth rent with the sound of them.

Zadok. Then, as one told who came from En-rogel,
Thine Adonijah heard it and his guests
As they had made an ending of the feast.
And Joab, when he heard the trumpet sound,
Said "Wherefore is this noise in Gihon heard?"
And, while he spake, behold came Jonathan,
Son of Abiathar, and to the lad
Said Adonijah at beholding him
"Come in, thou hast good tidings, valiant youth."
But low he answered "Verily our lord
King David hath made Solomon the king,"
And told of us who went with Solomon,
Anointing him and causing him to ride
On the king's mule, whereat the people there
Rejoiced so that the city rang again,
Making the tumult which they all had heard.
And all the guests of Adonijah rose
Afraid, and went each man unto his place.
And Adonijah feared to know the wrath
Of Solomon and to the altar fled,
Holding the horns thereof. And it was told
To Solomon, and Adonijah's words—
Saying "Let Solomon the king declare
This day he will not slay me with the sword,
Since I will serve him." Whereupon the king
Said, "If he show himself a worthy man,
There shall not fall a hair of him to earth,
But, wickedness prevailing, he shall die."
So from the altar he was brought and bowed

Himself before King Solomon who said
In mercy to him—"Go unto thine house."

Nathan. Thus, O my lord, is all our tale declared,
Save that the king doth follow after us
To seek thy blessing.

David. Surely hath the Lord
Been with ye all who have performed my will,
And with the people, and amid my foes,
And in the heart of Solomon to turn
His wrath against his brother to the grace
And mercy that doth glorify a king.

Benaiah. Now is rejoicing louder at thy gates
And Solomon the king is surely nigh.
Behold his messengers who go before.

[The Messengers of Solomon appear.]

Messengers. Hail! Mighty David, first of Judah's line,
Lo Solomon, thy son the king, attends.

[Solomon, Bathsheba and a retinue come within.]

All. Hail to the king! Long live King Solomon!

David. And I, who now am freest of ye all,
Repeat "Long live the king" whom God doth crown.

Solomon. I greet thee, O my father, next to her
Who bore me, as the king of Israel,
Yet, as thy son, thou art my king, and God
Shall rule me also from His heavenly throne.

David. Thou speakest wisely, Solomon, for the child
A father guideth justly can attain
No place above his counsel or the fear
Of God's commands—the mighty King of Kings.
Lo, I have heard that these anointed thee
At Gihon and of all the people's joy,
And now I do bestow this jeweled crown

Of Rabbah's king and bid thee to my seat
As king of Judah and of Israel.

*[Nathan giveth the crown to David who, as
Solomon boweth before him, placeth it upon
his head, and then raiseth his hands.]*

All. Hail to the king! Hail to King Solomon!

David. I bless thee, as the Lord of hosts shall bless,
Who from thy cradle hath appointed thee
To greater wealth and wisdom than mine own
Upon the throne He gave me—now thy trust.

Bathsheba. For all His grace I magnify the Lord.
Who Solomon and David long hath blessed.

David. My son, I go the way of all the earth,
Be therefore strong and show thyself a man,
And keep the charges of the Lord thy God
To walk in all His ways, to truly hold
His statutes and commandments, and no less
His judgments and His testimonies writ
By Moses in the law, that thou mayest find
Prosperity in all that thou shalt do
Whithersoever thou dost turn thyself.
That His word may continue which He spake
Concerning me that, if my children heed
Their way to walk before the Lord in truth—
To walk with all their heart and all their soul,
There shall not fail a man of David's line
Upon the throne of Israel. Beyond
This higher charge are certain others due.
Thou knowest well what Zeruiah's son,
E'en Joab, did to my son Absalom,
And what he did to captains of the host,
To wise and valorous Abner son of Ner
And Amasa the son of Jether, both

He slew and shed the blood of war in peace.
According to thy wisdom, therefore do,
Nor let his gray head seek in peace the grave.
And, Solomon, thou hast with thee the son
Of Gera—Shimei a Benjamite,
Who cursed thy father with a grievous curse
The day I went in flight from Absalom
To Mahanaim, casting stones at me.
But when I vanquished, Shimei came down
To Jordan humbled and I sware to him
Saying “I will not slay thee with the sword.”
Now therefore I am sworn, but, as to thee,
Hold him not guiltless, seeing thou art wise
And knowest what to him thou shouldst do;
But his hoar head bring to the grave in blood.
On these avenge their crimes against the throne,
But show thy kindness unto all the sons
Of Barzillai. Let them be of those
Who eat with thee, for so he honored me
What time I fled for fear of Absalom.
Lo Solomon, thou hast my throne and crown
Which came to me with thirty years of life
That, care fraught, made me seem already old,
A crown I have defended forty years,
Seven in Hebron, three and thirty here
In fair Jerusalem, from heathen foes,
Spreading for Abram’s seed the promised land
Jehovah gave, to glorify on earth
His single might and majesty unseen
Against the evil nations that bow down
To Baal, Dagon and all idols sought
In every lewd desire, and that commit
In all their groves and temples, night and day,

Abominations to the Lord we praise.
Go forth in righteousness to serve the Lord
In all thy ways, for He hath chosen thee,
As all thy brethren know in reverence
And all the host and all in judgment know,
To rule in Israel and build the house
Which shall be ever holy to His name.
He shall not fail thee or forsake until
The work is finished. He shall honor thee
With wisdom and with riches and with might
Beyond the kings of men and, if thou hold
To His commandments, will establish thee
And this thy throne forever. But take heed
When He shall grant thee every full desire,
Not to forsake Him, lest He cast thee off.

Solomon. Thy words possess my soul. The Lord sustain

Thy servant until all shall come to pass
And guide me for the joy of Israel.

Nathan. David my lord, I fain would speak to thee
Before all these assembled at thy side.

David. Say what thou wouldst; O Nathan, I attend.

Nathan. Behold, when Samuel, the mighty voice
Of God, the prophet-judge of Abram's seed,
Who chose a king for them at their desire
And chastened Saul for his rebellious pride,
And then anointed thee to gain his throne—
When Samuel had given up the ghost,
Then were the prophets few to counsel thee
And tell the will of God who loved thy zeal,
Or to admonish thee, until He sent
Thy servant, even me, to humbly wear
The cloak of mighty Samuel's fearless soul.

So, at the first, I gave thy grateful heart
Consent to build a house unto the Lord.
And all thy ways were prospered in His sight
Until thine arrogant desire slew
Uriah, faithful captain of the host,
To get his wife to thee. Then did I bear
The terrors of Jehovah's punishment
Which took the child of sin, thy concubines
And daughter gave to shame, and set thy house
At variance in jealousy and blood
And dread rebellion and all bitterness,
And, furthermore, forbade thy bloody hand
To build a holy temple to His name.
But, notwithstanding all the judgment's curse,
When thou didst bow repentant and confess
In tears and fasting thine iniquity
Before the Lord and all in Israel,
The mercy of Jehovah turned to thee,
And, counseled by His love, I sought again
Thy face to comfort thee for all distress;
To bless the second child Bathsheba bore,
That he should sit in wisdom on thy throne
In an exceeding glory and should build
With pure and loving heart, the holy house
It was thy will to raise unto the Lord.
Lo! Now his promises are counted sure,
Their fruits have hidden all the tares of woe,
For Solomon thy son is here our king
In all the excellence of good desire
And righteous purposes and pious zeal
To do thy will and to revere his God.
And all throughout the land do honor thee,
Riches and glory do thy couch surround,

And peace is in thine house, and love abides
On high to cherish thee until the end.
So I, who have in sorrow spoken words
Of judgment for the Lord, do now rejoice
That, by His grace, I now am come to bless.
Oh happy David, He remembereth
The pure heart of thy youth, the valiant years
Of many wars and perils in His trust,
Thy many deeds of justice and of love,
And, to His joy, the riches of thy praise
In songs that generations yet unknown
Shall treasure for their power and loveliness
And sing for consolation of their souls.
And He doth bless thee even as a son,
And taketh thee to His bosom and His peace,
Renowned to all who serve Him evermore.

Solomon. How can I hold so great a father's fame?
Only as God doth also bless my ways.

*[Solomon embraceth David and goeth forth,
followed by all save Abishag.]*

David. Sweet daughter, move these pillows that I rest.
My work is ended. Now the shepherd's crook,
The harp, the sling, the spear, the sword, the crown
And sceptre are but playthings for my dreams;
And woman's love and victory's delight,
And love of men—save Jonathan's alone—
Are fading as, in peace and faith and joy,
I move upheld by God toward the veil
That screens the holy place of love divine.

PART V.

PLACE.—The same. David upon his bed asleep. Solomon, Bathsheba and Abishag stand nigh to him.]

Abishag. I think, Bathsheba, that he sleepeth still.

Bathsheba. Abishag, thou hast cherished faithfully
My lord and, understanding all thy heart,
I thank thee in all love.

Abishag. Now he awakes.

David. Who standeth nigh, do I see Solomon?

Solomon. Yea, O my father, wouldst thou speak to
me?

David. Is all well with thee?

Solomon. Yea. I strive to reign
As thou hast bidden me.

David. The Lord be praised.
I led my sheep—O, Jonathan, thy love—

Solomon. His spirit wandereth amid the past.

David. The spirit of the Lord it spake to me,
His word was in my tongue. To me the God
Of Israel said—The Rock of Israel spake—
He must, who ruleth over men, be just,
Ruling forever in the fear of God
And He shall as the light of morning be,
What time the sun ariseth—as a morn
Without a cloud and as the tender grass
Out of the earth, clear shining after rain.
Although my house be not now so with God,
Yet He an everlasting covenant

Hath made with me, ordered in all and sure,
For this is my salvation and desire—

(II Sam. XXIII: 2-5.)

Solomon. He speaketh yet. What saith my father
more?

Bathsheba. I cannot hear. His words are very faint
He faileth. O Abishag succor me.
The soul of David passeth to the Lord.

[THE END.]



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